Upside Down & Back Again by bella is a tardis

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Summary: back from the Upside Down, El has to readjust to a normal life surrounded by family and friends. this story picks up after season one. while i do love season two, i just felt like picking this story up after s1 haha. but i will be incorporating bits of season 2 in this story (characters, etc)

1. in the real early morning

hi! welcome to my new story! I'm still writing Behind the Mask but I'm super obsessed with this show so I hAve to do this haha. All my chapter names are going to be song titles and at the end if the chapter I'll put the artist so you can go listen to them! All the songs will ~somewhat~ relate to the chapter content (some more than others). The plot is going to be fluid and it's *not* just a bunch of oneshots so i hope you enjooooy (this story is going to be hella chill and nice so don't expect anything super depressing lol) (i also know that this is pretty cringy it's going to be better eventually)

chapter one

in the real early morning

october twentieth, 1984

She couldn't feel her feet. She hadn't felt them for a while actually. Shuffling through the snow, she pushed her shoulder length dirty hair behind her ears and rubbed her eyes, feeling sleep crawl upon her. She collapsed by a nearby tree, sighing heavily as she closed her eyes and leant her head against the cold bark. Hunger and fear rolled off her like water on a raincoat, and her eyes squeezed even tighter, trying to repress the memories pushing at her mind, trying to break her. It wasn't long before Eleven was unwillingly drawn back into the Upside Down. The memory was one of her least favorites from her short stay in the awful place. She had only just been taken there and she hit the wall, over and over, the names of the friends she had left being yelled into the inky darkness. She sank to the floor soon after, tears rolling down her face and hands balled up, so tight her nails made indents on her palms. she allowed herself these few minutes before standing up, forcefully brushing the tears from her eyes and soldiering on. It had been months since then, evident by her shoulder length curly hair. She still had nightmares. Every night, haunted by her past. Even now, as she sat safe in the snow, she kept her eyes firmly shut, hands unconsciously grasping at the snow on the ground, making her hands cold.

"You haven't finished it yet?" exclaimed Dustin, staring at Mike and

watching as he wrung his hands guiltily.

"No! You know how much homework we got this week," he groaned, "Did you really think I'd have time to write a whole campaign?"

"Well, I got all my homework done early." he said.

"Good for you." grumbled Mike.

"Guys stop it." said Will, "We can do the campaign next weekend, we did get quite the homework load."

"Yeah, I've stayed up late every night, I've barely gotten any sleep." complained Lucas.

The four boys were on a walk through the woods behind Will's house. It was a Friday evening and they were all sleeping over. They didn't usually go on walks but the recent snowfall had excited them and well, who doesn't like to play in the snow.

El's head snapped up. She thought she had heard voices in the distance. As she listened, eyes still closed, the voices seemed to get louder, the conversation peppered with the occasional laugh. That's when she heard it. Mike's voice. She could recognize that voice from anywhere, having thought of it everyday for the past year. And to hear it now, in person, sent chills through her body. She immediately sprung up, forgetting her exhaustion and numbness, and began running towards the voices, her feet carrying her as fast as possible. Tears sprang into her eyes and a cramp formed at her side but she kept going, dodging trees until she ran right into a soft lump. she immediately bounced back and cleared the tears from her eyes. She looked down and was face to face with a small boy with brown hair looking thoroughly confused. Without even looking at the girl, his friends grabbed Will by the arms and pulled him to his feet.

"Guys," he said slowly, "I-I think that's El." Will had heard a lot about El in the year he'd been back. He'd heard every story and had taken part in every search for her. The boys had spent hours of their days just calling her name, walking through the woods. And this trip was another one of those times, even though they didn't say it.

Dustin, Mike, and Lucas looked up then, all in shock, they had nothing to say. Finally, Mike let out a breathy, "El!" And the four boys rushed to her, enveloping her in the biggest hug.

"I've missed you all. So much." whispered El quietly.

"We missed you too!" said Lucas.

"And you're just in time for Halloween!" exclaimed Dustin.

"Halloween?" asked El as the group hug broke apart.

"Yeah! It's where you dress up as something cool and go walk around the neighborhood to get candy!" explained Lucas as they started walking in the direction of Wills house.

"That was a shitty explanation." snorted Dustin.

"Well it's a bit hard to explain Halloween to someone with such a limited vocabulary." said Lucas, rolling his eyes.

"You'll love it." promised Dustin, ignoring Lucas' comment.

"Love?" whispered El, the word foreign on her tongue.

"Yeah, love is when you really really like someone or something." said Mike, a slight blush on his cheeks.

"More than friends?" whispered the girl again, her left hand brushing against the other boys right hand. His cheeks turned a dark pink then and all his friends turned to look at him with raised eyebrows and smirks playing across their faces.

"Uh, um, yes but uh it can also apply to um, other things too." he said, "like objects, or movies, or books, or anything really." he finished, the blush still evident and his fingers tingling where she touched them.

El nodded, satisfied with his answer. They walked in silence for a bit, everyone almost too giddy to speak. Eventually, Mike mustered up the courage to grab El's hand. And he did, causing her to look at him and blushes to appear on both of their faces.

"El, I'm going to take you back to my house. You remember my mom right?" asked Will, falling into step with her. Will had never formally met Eleven, only hearing stories from his friends and family. But, she had saved his life and he felt that made them friends, of some kind.

"Joyce." she said quietly. Will nodded.

"Thank you for saving me last year." he said, "I know we've never really met before but I hope we can be friends." El smiled weakly at him,

"Friends." she said. Will smiled back and they kept walking, the almost setting sun made the sky several shades of pink and orange, a stark contrast to the white trees and ground, littered with freshly fallen snow.

Joyce had gotten off work early, wanting to be at home for Will and his friends when they slept over. When she had arrived home, the boys weren't there and she only panicked briefly before finding a scribbled note on the counter saying, "we went for a walk." She had only been waiting for about ten minutes before the door creaked open and she heard the soft chatter of her son and his friends. She walked into the living room and was about to greet them before she noticed the girl standing behind Mike and Lucas, half her face peeking out from behind them.

"Is that-" she began. Will nodded,

"It's El." he said, gently pushing the girl out from her hiding spot. Joyce rushed forward and met the girl halfway, enveloping her in a big hug. El pressed her face into the older womans shoulder and felt tears brimming in her closed eyes.

"I missed you." said Joyce.

"I missed you too." sniffled El. Joyce pulled back from the hug and held the girl at arms length, taking in her skinny, almost skeletal frame, Nancy's old dress practically hanging off of her, and her matted, greasy hair.

"You need a shower." she declared.

"A… shower?" asked El. Joyce nodded,

"it's like a bath but the water comes shooting from a metal thing called a shower head."

"Shooting?" asked a concerned El.

"No, um, not shooting. Here, let me go show you." she gently placed her hand on El's back and led her down the hallway towards the bathroom. Once they disappeared behind the door, The four boys all looked at each other before breaking into elated grins.

In the bathroom, Joyce had pressed a fluffy towel into El's hands and was searching through Wills pajama drawer to find the softest and warmest pajamas he had. Once she had brought them into the bathroom, she pointed out the shampoo, conditioner, and body wash before teaching El how to make the water hotter or colder.

"There you go! I'll leave you now but I'll be just outside and by the time you come out dinner will be ready." said Joyce, smiling warmly as she left the room, slowly closing the door behind her. El turned to the mirror but quickly turned away as soon as she saw her appearance. All of Nancy's clothes were beyond help so they were thrown in the trash before she stepped into the shower to wash away a year's worth of grime.

"She likes Eggos." said Mike, after Joyce asked them all what El's dream meal would be.

"But," added Lucas, "I think she'd eat anything you put in front of her." Joyce nodded slowly and began walking towards the fridge, checking it's insides for Eggos and anything else that would make a better dinner food than frozen waffles.

"Do you think she'll start school?" Will asked his mom as she began work on a multi course meal.

"I'll have to talk with Hopper first. We'll have to settle adoption papers and see how much she actually knows." she responded.

"Adoption papers? Are we going to adopt her?" asked Will.

"If she has no objections." said Joyce.

"Oh, cool!" Responded Will enthusiastically. He couldn't help but notice how Mike's smile dropped a little, and he wasn't the only one who noticed.

"Mike, you weren't seriously thinking she'd move in with you?" said Dustin, rolling his eyes. Mile shrugged a little. "You like like her, don't deny it." he continued, "and you can't live with someone you like y'know? Besides, then your family would have to adopt her and then she'd be your sister and then-" Mike shut him up by putting his hand on the Dustins mouth, a blush slowly creeping up his cheeks.

"Please. Just shut up." said Mike, embarrassed. Joyce listened to their conversation quietly, smiling slightly.

"We can't get too ahead of ourselves, she did only just show up today." She reminded them.

El looked down at her feet and the water swirling around them. It was littered with dirt, dried blood, and shampoo bubbles. She looked up and caught her reflection in the mirror across the room. She squinted, she didn't look as bad as she did but she was much skinnier and the constant rumble in her stomach was a reminder of that. She ran her hands through her hair, smoothing it out and washing it thoroughly before gingerly stepping out of the shower and wrapping herself up in the fluffy towel laid out for her. El turned off the water and began drying off, sliding into Will's pyjamas and stepping out into the hallway, her feet making almost silent pitter, patter noises on the floors. When she entered the kitchen, everyone turned to look at her.

"El!" exclaimed Dustin, "it felt like you were gone for forever in there."

"Dustin's having some separation anxiety." joked Lucas.

"Shut up, I'm just glad she's finally back with us, home again." he said.

"Home." whispered El, walking over to the table and taking the only

open seat, between Will and Mike.

"Okay, so I made quite the feast." said Joyce, gesturing to all the food she had prepared. "I've got Eggos, pancakes, bacon, and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches." El gazed at the food with her lips partly opened before a plate was placed in front of her with one of each item. She first went in for the eggos but did enjoy everything else as well. She had several servings before wandering over to the couch and curling up under a blanket, watching the boys play a game with eyes barely open.

"Oh!" exclaimed Will suddenly, "El hasn't met Daisy!"

"Daisy?" she asked quietly, propped her head on her hand with a confused look on her face. She searched her mind for what a daisy was before coming upon, "a flower?"

"My dog!" he said. He ran out of the room and came back with an animal El had never seen before. It's tail was wagging wildly but stopped when it made eye contact with the other wide-eyed girl. Daisy wiggled out of Wills grasp and padded over to El, touching her nose to El's before curling up on the ground in front of her and letting El run her hands through her fur.

"She likes me." whispered the girl. The boys grinned at each other before going back to their game. El let her eyes close and took in the sounds of her friends laughter and the soft dog under her hand. "Home." she whispered, almost inaudibly.

song: in the real early morning by Jacob Collier

2. I don't wanna break

this is one of those times where the chapter title barely relates to the chapter content lol

chapter two

i don't want to break

10:25 pm

"Put me on the phone with Chief Hopper please." said Joyce, pacing back in forth with the phone held tightly in her hand.

"Is this Joyce Byers *again*?" asked Jim's secretary.

"Yes. It's important." responded Joyce impatiently.

"Mhm." Florence placed the phone on the table and after a few seconds of silence Jim picked up,

"Joyce? Is everything okay?" he asked.

"Yes. Something has uh, come up. How fast can you be at my house?"

"I'll be right there." he said, hanging up and running to grab his jacket.

"What is it this time?" asked Florence

"No idea. But you can go home, I won't be back later." he responded, running out of the door and into his car, kicking it into action and driving way over the speed limit. Not that it mattered, no one was out on the streets late at night. When he arrived at the Byers home, Joyce met him on the front porch.

"There's someone inside that you might want to see." she said. He noticed the cigarette being twirled between her fingers but paid no notice to it, only giving her a confused look before pushing the door open and taking in the scene in front of him. Will and his friends were all huddled around the coffee table, an intricate board game

laid in front of them, all of them whispering in hushed tones. Then, on the couch was the one thing he was not expecting today. *Eleven*. Curled up under three blankets, the family dog curled at her feet, laid Eleven. He turned around and looked at Joyce with wide eyes, she merely shrugged in response.

"How did she-" he began. Joyce cut him off, taking his arm and dragging him into the kitchen before explaining everything that had happened since she'd shown up at her house. "You want to adopt her?" asked Hopper.

"Yes. She needs a loving, supporting family and I want to supply that for her." she responded.

"Okay. And schooling?" he asked.

"I think we should start from the very beginning, see how much they taught her in that hellhole." she said bitterly. Hopper nodded,

"I agree."

"Lucas you do it, you're a strong man." said Dustin. They all stood huddled around the couch staring at El. The plan was to get ready for bed, then continue the game in Wills room but they didn't want to leave El all alone on the couch.

"I could do it." suggested Mike. Dustin rolled his eyes before nudging Lucas, pointing at the sleeping girl. Lucas scooped up El in one motion, blankets and all.

"She's not that heavy." he said, as they made their way towards Wills room, Will and Dustin each holding one half of the board game, careful not to move the pieces.

"Yeah well she hasn't had an actual meal in a year." said Mike. Lucas carefully laid her down on Wills bed and readjusted her blankets so she was all tucked in. Will and Dustin carefully placed the board game on the ground and everyone adjusted their sleeping bags to form a square around it. They continued playing for another hour, stopping for a few minutes when Jonathon arrived home and came rushing into the room, wanting to see El for himself (Joyce had

explained everything). Soon however, they grew tired and put the game away, careful not to mess with the pieces too much since they weren't finished. Will switched off the light and they all tried to sleep, not with much success seeing as all their minds still buzzed with excitement and confusion.

"Would you like to stay the night?" asked Joyce, while she and Jim had a lengthy discussion about El. "Just in case she uh, runs away in the night." Jim stared at her for a moment,

"Why not, I'll sleep on the couch if you'd like." he responded. Then they promptly went back to their discussion, as if nothing had happened.

october twenty-first, 1985 (one am)

El awoke to awful retching noises in the other room.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Will." responded Lucas quietly, a frown evident in his voice. The boys had been awake for a few minutes prior to El, silently laying on the floor.

"He's never really told us what's wrong, I don't even think he knows we know what's happening." said Dustin. Mike gazed up at El from his spot next to the bed,

"El." he said softly, "what happened?" She didn't need an explanation for that one. She thought back to her long year; her long, awful year. El's face scrunched up and she closed her eyes, trying to think of a memory that would answer the question but wouldn't make them awfully sad. "You don't have to answer." said Mike hurriedly, after seeing El's scrunched up face.

"No." she said quietly, holding out both of her hands to the three boys, "take my hands." they did as she asked and suddenly found themselves standing in a snowy forest, looking on at a small shivering girl. "I was so alone." El's soft voice echoed around them: "I ate little, mostly scraps left from strangers." They followed El through the trees before they came upon a wooden box, the only thing in sight that

wasn't under a thick, white blanket. She opened the box and pulled out a stack of eggos wrapped in cling film. "Was it you?" she asked quietly. The boys looked at each other before shaking their heads. Their surrounding puffed into nothing and they were brought back to the warm embrace of their sleeping bags.

"I bet it was the chief." said Dustin, a slight tone of bitterness in his voice.

"I'm going to have *words* with him next time I see him," spat Mike.

"I don't think you'll have long to wait for that." said a voice at the door. It was Will, pale and sickly looking, clutching onto a glass of water.

"What do you mean?" asked Mike.

"Well, he's still here." he said, sitting down slowly on his sleeping bag. "I think he's sleeping over." all the other boys raised their eyebrows,

"Really?" said Dustin, "are he and your mom-" Will cut him off,

"I don't know how you're going to end that sentence and I don't think I want to know. But uh, the answer to your question is probably no." said Will, taking an awkward sip of his water. "Why are you so mad at him anyway?" he asked.

"We think he knew about El." said Mike.

"And he said *nothing*?" said Will, after the boys had filled him in. El had fallen back asleep, but no one else was tired anymore. "Why?" he asked after awhile of silence. Lucas shrugged,

"I guess we'll find out in the morning." he said.

"Or we could find out now." offered Mike. Dustin shook his head,

"No we'll give him tonight, then confront him tomorrow. Besides, he's probably asleep." Dustin said, glancing at the clock on Will's bedside table. The boys all nodded in agreement before falling into silence, hoping to fall asleep.

Morning came, and four angry teens came with it. They pretended nothing was amiss as they left Wills room for breakfast. It was a slightly awkward affair, as Jonathan was staring down the chief practically the whole time.

"Did you sleep here last night?" he asked eventually.

"On the couch." said Jim hurriedly. Joyce sipped her coffee quietly and stared out the window while El yawned and slowly cut into her waffles, mostly taking in the faces of the people around her, sensing the awkwardness but not really understanding where it came from. Mike decided, after a few silent conversations through eye contact with his friends, that now would be a good time to confront Hopper.

"Chief," he began, setting down his fork and making direct, intense eye contact with the man across the table, "Last night El showed us something that led us to believe you *knew* El was alive this past year." everyone turned to look at him as Mike glared from across the table. El's eyes widened, she had been listening as they had talked about this last night but didn't think they'd actually confront him.

Shit, shit, shit. I knew *they'd find out sometime.* Thought Hopper as he was stared down from all angles. *Why didn't I just tell them in the beginning?*

"I uh, didn't want to get your hopes up." he said. "I knew someone was getting the food but I didn't know *who*. I could have very well been some homeless stranger none of us have ever laid eyes on. And even if it was El, maybe she didn't want to come back." he said. Everyone sat in silence a moment, digesting his words.

"Didn't want to come back?" said Will quietly, "that place is hell." Jonathan wrapped a comforting arm around his shoulder for a moment before pulling away.

"You still should have told us." said Dustin, his arms crossed.

"I wasn't getting your food from the bad place." said El. "I didn't want you to see me, it could have been, dangerous."

"I promise I'll never keep something from you all again." said Jim. His

apology seemed sincere and although everyone was skeptical they forgave him anyway. Joyce however, was concentrating more on what El had just said.

"Dangerous?" she asked, "How could it have been dangerous, sweetie?"

"The bad men. They might want me back and, I don't want, you all to get hurt." El responded. "I l-love you all." she said quietly, remembering the word from yesterday. Mike clutched her hand under the table and Dustin gave her a hug from the other side,

"We love you too." he said into her shoulder on behalf of the rest of the table.

"Does she think Brenner and his crew are still alive?" asked Jim as he and Joyce stood outside on the porch.

"Maybe she's seen him. Maybe he did get her back for awhile. She was gone for a whole year" she responded. "And who knows what happened."

"And who knows how long it'll take to get it all out of her." muttered Hopper.

song: I don't wanna break by Christina Perri

3. the way I am

chapter three

the way i am

october twenty-first, 1994

Mike, Dustin, and Lucas left before lunch, rather unwillingly.

"I'll see you all tomorrow." she promised, her voice still quite raspy and quiet. They all enveloped her in a massive hug and nearly knocked her over. El giggled and gently pushed them off.

"See you tomorrow!" chorused the boys as they hopped on their bikes and drove away. El and Will waved from the door until they were gone.

"So," he began, "What would you like to do? What if we made you a place to sleep?" he suggested. El nodded,

"A fort?" she asked.

"If you'd like. I think you should at least have a mattress." he responded. Joyce walked in on them while they were talking,

"I was actually just coming in here to tell you both; we're going to build El a bedroom!" she said, smiling. "Hopper and I worked it all out last night. We think it should be the first thing we do because you need a place to sleep whatever happens." El grinned at her,

"Thank you." she whispered.

"It's no problem." responded Joyce. She then led them to the end of the hallway and pointed to the empty wall space closest to Wills room. "We think it should go here, that way you'll both be close." El gently touched the wall with her fingertips and nodded,

"Here is good." she said. Joyce gave El's hair a short pat before leaving the two teens in peace.

"Well, building a whole bedroom doesn't take one day. Let's go build that fort." said Will, grinning. El nodded enthusiastically and they set off in search of any unused pillows and blankets they could find. They came back to Wills room not long after they left, El's arms laden with pillows while Will carried the blankets. They gently tossed the items on the bed and set to work, El would toss pillows at Will and he'd gently set them in place. It wasn't long before Will draped the final blanket on the top of their fort, completing it. "Ta da!" She sat down inside and patted the space next to her. WIll sat down and turned to face her,

"I was there." she said.

"I heard." said WIll, nodding.

"But, the uh, coughing, I- I don't do that." she responded, tilting her head.

"The Demogorgon. It got me." he said solemnly. "In the end. You wouldn't know this, since you were gone by the time everyone found out. But it got me. And put this *thing* in me, and it must have planted eggs in me or something because for the past year I've been throwing up these- these slugs." El cut him off,

"Slugs?"

"Yes. Except I don't think they are slugs. They're slimy and sometime move but they don't look like a slug, y'know?" he said. El didn't know but nodded slowly anyway.

"Where are they going?" she asked.

"We usually flush them away or keep them in a bag in the shed, mom thinks we can take them to the lab and they'll tell us what they are."

"The bad men." El whispered, her face paling. Will shook his head,

"The bad men are gone." he said, "Some new guy is running it now." El wasn't convinced but went along with it anyway.

That night, El came back into Will's room after taking a shower and found him reading a book.

"What's that?" she asked, tilting her head in hopes of seeing the title.

"The Hobbit!" he exclaimed, "do you know how to read?" he added as a second thought. El shook her head and Will placed his book down and ran to his closet and opened the door. El couldn't see what he was doing, and was surprised when he turned around carrying a precarious stack of books ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. "Here! Start with the ones on the top, they're mostly picture books but they'll get you started. I stacked them so the books get harder as you go down." El widened her eyes and sat down in her fort. Will placed the books next the her.

"Thank you." she whispered.

"It's no problem," said Will, shrugging, "let me know if you need any help." They fell into a comfortable silence as Will went back to The Hobbit and El picked up the first book in the stack. The first picture was of a dog, a similar looking dog to Daisy (who was sleeping at the end of Wills bed at that moment). She looked at the text "d-o-g" it said. She figured that must say dog, seeing as there was a picture of a dog next to it. She went through this book pretty quickly, and went through the rest almost as fast. She only had to ask Will for help a few times and by midnight, El had almost finished the entire stack. Will had fallen asleep about an hour before and El eyed The Hobbit determinedly. She was *going* to start it tonight.

october twenty-second, 1984

The next morning, Joyce found El surrounded by books and clutching The Hobbit, a finger stuck between the pages marking where she'd left off. She shook Will awake gently,

"Did you teach her to read?" asked Joyce, sitting on his bed. Will laughed,

"She mostly taught herself." he said.

"She's a very fast learner." observed his mother. Will nodded,

"I thought it would take her a bit longer than one night." He went and sat next to her, and the sudden jostle of the books awoke her.

"Will!" she said after a moments panic.

"Good morning." he said, "did you read all of these books last night?" El nodded,

"Have you got anymore?" she asked, "I'm almost done with this one." Will saw she was right, she was far past halfway.

"Uh, yes. But let's eat breakfast first." Will pried the book out of her hands and pulled her to her feet. They followed Joyce out of the room and went to eat.

Later that day, They went over to Mike's house. El met Nancy and later, after a lot of talking with the older girl, once they were all down in the basement, she got teary eyed seeing the fort that Mike had kept up over the past year. She didn't even mind when he told her it was technically the second fort, it just touched her to see how much he really cared.

october twenty-third, 1984

Monday came and the four boys went into school, happy and still on such a high they didn't even pay notice to Troy and his asshole friends. Will's day however, took a hit when he opened his locker and a bundle of papers fluttered to the ground, all labeled "zombie boy". As he picked them up, a soft voice started up behind him:

"Hey." it said. He turned to see Daniel, one of the new kids.

"Oh, hi." he said, his cheeks turning a shade pinker.

"So what's this about?" Daniel asked, taking the papers from Will with one hand as he ran his fingers through his curly hair with the other. Daniel had blonde hair the was curly on the top and shaved on the sides. He was tall, tan, and had hundreds of little freckles scattered across his skin.

"You don't know? Surely someone's told you." responded Will, taking his science book from his locker and closing the door behind him.

"Nope."

"Last year, I went missing. I uh, fell from a cliff and survived, but everyone thought I was dead so um, I was declared dead for a bit but eventually, I woke up and got the name 'zombie boy'." Explained Will, taking the papers from Daniel and throwing them away when they passed a trash can.

"But why would people think you came back from the dead if you were only in a coma?" asked the other boy. Will shrugged,

"It was more than that. I almost had a funeral and everything." said Will.

"Almost?"

"Yeah well thankfully I woke up before I got buried alive." said Will, jokingly. He knew that if Daniel asked any of the kids, they'd tell him that there *was* actually a funeral. A funeral that *Jennifer Hayes cried* at (not that he'd need to know that part). Daniel grinned at him.

"I'm Daniel by the way. Daniel Everett." he said holding out a hand. Will took it,

"I'm Will. Will Byers." they smiled at each other and as Daniel walked away, he looked over his shoulder and *winked*. Will blushed even harder and scurried into his class, his friends giving him confused looks the whole period.

"So you know Daniel?" Will asked cautiously as the four boys rode home on their bikes.

"Which one?" said Mike.

"Daniel Everett." responded Will, choosing his next words carefully. "I-I think he's really cute and sweet and he isn't as mean as the other kids. I told him today, what happened. Not all of it obviously but he asked when he saw some kids call me zombie boy. So I told him and that was that, he didn't laugh or act super weirded out." he said all this in a super fast slur, and when he finished he wasn't even sure if his friends knew what he had just said. Although, as their bikes came to a halt, he figured they had heard correctly. They stood in awkward silence for a moment before Mike started biking again and everyone

joined in.

"He does seem pretty nice," said Mike, shrugging.

"He has nice hair." said Dustin. Will nodded,

"He does, and freckles." he said dreamily.

"Is he why you were blushing so much in science?" asked Dustin. Will nodded, grinning slightly.

"I heard he moved from Massachusetts, you caught yourself an east-coaster!" said Lucas, laughing.

"I haven't caught anyone yet." said Will, laughing along with him, "we're not even friends, really."

"Well, you *will* be friends with him, I can't think of a reason why he wouldn't want to be your friend." said Mike.

"Thanks." said WIll.

"Speaking of new kids," began Lucas, "*and* nice hair…"

"Max? Again?" said Mike, frowning and rolling his eyes.

"We actually talked today! In PE, I accidentally hit her with a basketball and when I said sorry, she told me to go away." he said.

"Well that's progress I suppose." said Dustin with a snort.

When Will got home, he immediately ran to the bathroom and threw up all the slugs he'd had to keep down while at school. He found early on that people weren't going to just ignore someone throwing up in school. El had silently crept up on him and ne nearly jumped out of his skin when he turned around and was met with her concerned stare.

"Your cheeks." she said, "they're pink." she held out and pressed a hand against his face. He brushed off her comment but made a mental note to explain everything to her later.

"Have you been here all day? Alone?" he asked. She shook her head as they went to find a more comfortable place to talk, ending up in El's fort.

"I was at Hoppers."

"Doesn't he have to go to work?" asked Will. El shrugged,

"He didn't go today." she fiddled with her hands, "no one knows where to put me." she added quietly.

"That doesn't mean we don't want you!" said Will hurriedly, "maybe you can stay with Mike's mom? I'm sure his little sister would love you." El looked up,

"Really? I wouldn't be uh, a burden?" she asked. Will raised his eyebrows,

"That's a big word." he laughed.

"I read it in a book." she responded, smiling.

"But no, you wouldn't be a burden. And you're not a burden now." he said. "Okay, well I have to go do homework. Do you want a new book?" El nodded,

"first, do you need help with your uh, homework?" she asked, "what is homework?" she added after a moment.

"It's basically just schoolwork that teachers give you to do at home." he said. She mouthed a silent 'oh'. "I have math homework if you want to help. I don't know if you already know any math but if you don't maybe I can teach you." he took out his math binder and removed the sheet he was supposed to do. El looked it over before pointing at the first question,

"Thirty-five." she whispered. Will looked over with raised eyebrows.

"Uh, okay." he quickly did the math while she looked over his shoulder. "Oh." he said, when his answer did end up at 35. The rest of the homework went mostly like this and they finished the whole sheet in ten minutes. This left them lots of free time to do whatever

they wanted before Jonathan and Joyce got home. "I think we should go take Daisy out. Then I think I'll give you the Sherlock books." El nodded and they stood up to go look for Daisy.

"Sherlock?" El asked as they sat on the back steps, waiting for Daisy to come back with the stick they'd thrown for her.

"Yeah, he's a detective." El and Will sat outside for at least another hour, Will telling El all about Sherlock Holmes and El sitting quietly, simply enjoying sitting outside with her friend and soon to be brother.

the way i am by ingrid michaelson

4. better together

Hi! Sorry for the short hiatus, my life's been pretty busy lately! In other news, I decided to create a Spotify account with all the songs (aka the chapter titles)! It's called ud&ba and my account is bella_is_a_tardis. Go check it out! I'll be updating it when I publish the corresponding chapter. Also a little bit about the convo in the beginning of this story, I have no idea how their high school works so I used stuff from my high school lol.

chapter four

better together

october twenty-eighth, 1984

It was Saturday evening and all the kids were lounging around, waiting for Mike to finish writing the campaign, El was watching intensely at his shoulder.

"Have you all started looking at high school classes?" asked Lucas, laying on the floor of Mike's basement.

"No?" said Dustin, who was laying on the couch staring at the ceiling. "We literally started eighth grade less than two months ago."

"Well, I have. I'm going to tryout for football." he said. All eyes immediately turned to him and the scratching of Mike's pen came to a halt.

"Really?" asked Will, who was laying on the opposite end of the couch, legs entwined with Dustin's.

"Do you think I won't make it?" asked Lucas.

"Of course you'll make it." said Mike, going back to his writing.

"Don't you have to, you know, work out for that?" asked Dustin. Lucas rolled his eyes,

"Well obviously. I've been running around the neighborhood every

weekend." he said.

"what is.. football?" asked El.

"It's a sport." explained Lucas, "you throw around a ball and try to get it through a goal at the end of the field." El nodded slowly, going back to watching Mike. "It's double blocked though which means I won't be able to take as many electives."

"I haven't even looked at the electives yet." said Will, "I suppose I'll take art, but that's only one." there was a few seconds before Mike held up the paper and exclaimed,

"Done!"

Dustin sighed, "Finally!"

They played until dinner. El watched from Mike's side, trying to understand the game and the rules so maybe she could play with them one day. She had placed her hand on Mike's knee and would occasionally rest her head on his shoulder which made his breath hitch. Dinner came all too soon but the boys promised to keep playing once they were finished.

"El," asked Nancy once they had all settled down at the table, "do you need any clothes? I've got *boxes* of clothes your size that I don't wear anymore. After dinner we can go through them if you want."

"That's nice of you, Nancy." said her mother. El nodded,

"Thank you." El had been wearing clothes of Will's for the past week. It wasn't bad, but she was looking forward to getting clothes of her own. After dinner, Nancy led El upstairs. She sat the younger girl on her bed and went into the closet, coming out a few seconds later carrying three big boxes almost overflowing with clothes. She set those down and left the room, coming back with another box, this one empty.

"We can go through these and pick out your favorites and put them in this empty box." said Nancy, sitting next to El. The younger girl was completely overwhelmed, as she had never had to make fashion decisions before. Nancy seemed to notice this and tried to make it

easier.
"Since this is your first time actually picking clothes, I recommend you pick a few things from each category. So a few dresses, some pants, some shorts, some jackets." El nodded, taking this advice in. Nancy opened the first box and they started sifting through it, El picked out a denim jacket, some floral summer dresses, a few pairs of jeans, and some fun colored pants. They got through all three boxes in under an hour and El was left with one big heavy box. Nancy also gave her a few pairs of underwear and some bras but promised to take her shopping eventually. "Will you help me carry this downstairs?" she asked.

"Yes." said El, "Thank you, I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome! I think appreciate is the biggest word I've ever heard you say." joked Nancy. El smiled,

"I've done lots of reading since we last talked."

"Clearly." said Nancy, smiling back. The two girls picked up the heavy box and brought it downstairs, setting it by the door. All the boys followed them down, having been waiting in Mike's room.

"That's a lot of clothes." said Dustin.

"You'll be set for a while." said WIll. El nodded,

"All seasons." she said. Nancy smiled and left the teens to go downstairs, back to their game.

"So El, what did you think of D&D?" asked Will. They were waiting for Jonathan in the car later that night. He said he was going to talk to Nancy "for a minute" but it had been *several* minutes.

"It was… interesting. Can I play too next time?" she asked.

"Yeah! We'll have to make you a character first though." he responded. El nodded before adding,

"Why is Jonathan taking so long?" Will rolled his eyes,

"Because he's talking to Nancy."

"Is that… bad?" she asked.

"No, but they *like* each other. The problem is, Nancy is already dating Steve."

"Dating?" she asked.

"Yeah. When you date someone you're in a romantic relationship with them. You can also go on dates with that person." He responded, struggling to come up with an adequate description.

"Oh." said El, taking all his words in.

They only waited a few minutes before Jonathan came out, smiling.

october twenty-ninth, 1984

"Is it okay if we take you to the Wheelers? Hopper is coming with us so he can't look after you." said Joyce, the next morning at breakfast. El nodded,

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"The lab." said Will, picking at the food on his plate.

"We're going to see if they'll help Will. As I'm sure you know, he hasn't been doing so well." said Joyce.

"They... don't help." said El, narrowing her eyes.

"Brenner is gone." said Joyce softly. El shook her head slightly but said nothing. After breakfast, Will went out to the shed, Daisy following closely behind him. El waited by the back door, watching as Will disappeared behind the shed door and came out a few minutes later carrying a small black bag gingerly between his fingers.

"Is that… the slug?" asked El. Will nodded, and opened the bag a bit so El could peek in. Daisy tried to nose her way between them, probably in search of a snack. El gently pushed her away and looked in the bag, recoiling almost immediately.

"Do you think it's from the upside down?" asked WIll bitterly.

"Yes." said El, her face pale. They didn't say much as they put Daisy inside and went to the car, Will in the front and El in the back, the small black bag placed on the seat next to her.

Joyce dropped El off at Mike's house. As El got out of the car, Will waved nervously from the passenger seat.

"I don't know how long we'll be but it should only take a few hours." said Joyce, after rolling down the window. El nodded,

"Ok."

"Be good!" she said, smiling and waving as she drove out of the driveway. El waved and went to the front door. It opened before she could knock and Mrs. Wheeler appeared.

"Hello! Mike's in his room, he's been waiting all day for you." she said, smiling. El smiled back and pattered up the stairs. Mike met her at the top, breathless from running to the stairs.

"Hi." he said.

"Hi." responded El, eyes wide. They were inches apart and awkwardly stared into each others eyes before Mike pulled back,

"Do you, uh, want to go for a walk? We can ride my bike into town and I can show you the arcade!" El nodded,

"Okay." she said. She waited on the stairs for mike to go grab his jacket and when he came back they were walking to get Mike's bike, barely any words were said.

"What's the arcade like?" asked El, finally breaking their awkward silence.

"It's a place where people go to play games. We've got the highscore in most of the games." said Mike, saying the last part proudly. El rested her head on his back and Mike's heart started beating wildly.

"Sounds fun." she said, her voice muffled. They rode in silence for a few minutes before El's mind wandered back to the conversation she'd had with Will the night before. "Is this a date?" she asked. Mike

was so taken-aback that he almost crashed the bike. Once he'd steadied the small vehicle, he slowly responded.

"Uh, no. If I were taking you on a date - which I will eventually, we'd do lots more than go to the arcade. Where did you learn about dates anyway?" he said.

"Will. He told me you usually go on dates with someone you're in a romantic relationship with. I uh, don't know if we're in a romantic relationship." she said.

"Well, In a romantic relationship, you've got a boyfriend and a girlfriend, or boyfriend and boyfriend and girlfriend and girlfriend. And uh, you go on dates and um, kiss, and do sweet things for each other." He said this all very fast and it took a few seconds for El to respond.

"We've kissed." she said. Mike nodded and fell silent. El understood that he wasn't ready to talk about this. She wasn't even sure she was ready. There was so much she'd yet to learn.

They spent the rest of the ride in a mostly comfortable silence, both lost in thought. When they arrived at the arcade, El jumped off the bike and marveled at the bright and flashing lights coming from the building. Mike put his bike on the rack and walked back to El, tentatively taking her hand and gently pulled her through the front doors. "Where do we start?" asked El. Mike glanced around and caught a glimpse of fiery red hair that he immediately identified as Max's.

"Uh, over here." he said, pulling her in the other direction of Max.

Mike taught El how to play every single game and she quickly climbed the scoreboards, getting first place in almost all of them.

"Do you have to be so good at everything?" asked Mike, jokingly. El shrugged, smiling as she beat another of the boys top scores. The only game they hadn't gotten their hands on, was Dig Dug. Max had been intensely playing for the past hour and had barely taken her eyes off the screen

"Who is she?" asked El, having caught Mike staring at the girl several times.

"That's Max." he responded. "She goes to our school. Lucas has a crush on her." he said the last part with a smirk on his face.

"He wants to.. date her?" asked El, remembering the word. Mike shrugged,

"I guess. But she'd never say yes. She mostly says things along the lines of 'go away' and 'you're being annoying'." said Mike. El cocked her head at this before straightening up and walking over to the other girl. Mike scrambled after her but was too late.

"Hello." said El. Max swung her head around.

"Hey? Do I know you?" she asked. El shook her head.

"I, uh, like your hair." she said. Max's face softened for a quick second,

"Thank you. Is that all you came here to say?" asked Max, reaching down to grab her bag and sling it over her shoulder.

"No?" said El, her voice squeaking a bit. Max snorted,

"Okay. What's your name?" she asked.

"Elev- El. My name's El." said El. Max reached out a hand and El stared at it for a few seconds before the other girl reached down and grabbed her hand and shook it.

"Hi El. I'm Max."

"Hi." The stood awkwardly before Max spoke up,

"My brother is waiting for me but I'll see you at school, yeah?" That is, you do go to Hawkins Middle right? I mean, I've never seen you." El shook her head,

"I don't go to school yet. I just got back from a big, um, trip." she made it up quickly. This was the first time she'd interacted with a

stranger since she'd returned and didn't have a story yet.

"Oh okay, well I guess I'll see you around." said Max, giving El a smile before rolling her eyes at an angry beep coming from outside.

"Is that your brother?" asked El.

"Yeah. He's an asshole." she said, before walking away with one last wave to El.

"What's an asshole?" asked El, wandering back over to where Mike stood, agape.

"Uh, a mouth breather." he responded, picking a word she already knew. "But I wouldn't repeat it in front of any adults." he warned her.

"Oh." she said casually.

"How did you do that?" asked Mike, amazed.

"Do what?" asked El.

"Just, become friends with her like that." he said.

"I said I liked her hair." responded El, shrugging. Mike laughed but continued to gaze at her as they went to play Dig Dug. He decided she could do anything she set her mind to, even making friends with the mean new girl.

song: better together by jack johnson

5. I want to break free

sorry for the lack in updates! Life's been crazy lately (and i started watching Glee and haven't done much else with my nights besides binge watch it lol)

chapter five

i want to break free

"Say it again, Tom. Slower this time." said Chief Jim Hopper, sitting back in his chair.

"Holes, Jim. Absolutely everywhere in my yard!" said the irate man in front of him.

"And you think it's, uh, dogs?" said Hopper.

"Yeah small dogs. Sometimes there's more than others, but I just don't know where they're coming from. I mean, sometimes I find the top of the sewer by my house loose but-" said Tom.

"You think they're coming from the sewer?" Hopper interrupted.

"No. That's crazy… isn't it?" Hopper ran a hand lover his head,

"I've seen stranger things." he said with a sigh. "Well, I can look into it for you. Do the holes lead anywhere?"

"I don't know, they're pretty small. I generally just fill them back up and go along with my day. I do have a business you know."

"Don't worry Tom, I can handle it." said Hopper, patting the man on the shoulder as he stood up and walked out of the room.

"How do you feel, sweetie?" asked Joyce, looking from the road to her son, who had been sitting silently beside her the whole car ride. Will looked at his mother and shrugged,

"I don't- I don't really know. Not nervous, although I guess I feel a little queasy. That could be a slug though." he said, sighing. Joyce

placed a hand on his shoulder and took her eyes off the road for a second to glance at him. He was pale, which wasn't unusual. He had both his hand firmly on his knees and his eyes were practically glued to the road in front of them. Joyce removed her hand and looked back at the road. They spend the rest of the ride in silence.

"They really do make you wait forever." said Hopper. The three of them were sitting in the reception room, if you could even call it that. The room was empty, besides one bench that they were currently occupying. Will nodded, silently. He grasped the small black bag tightly.

"Will Byers, that must be you!" said a voice suddenly. Wills gaze shot up in surprise but he relaxed when he saw that it was only Doctor Owens. Will and his mother had gone to the lab once before. Not long after Will had returned, they had gone in to talk. Will hadn't mentioned the slugs, in fact, no one knew about those for a few weeks. That was until Joyce had walked in to see him choking on one. This visit though, was all about the slugs.

"And you say that they're slug-like?" asked the doctor. Will nodded, leaning back on his elbows. "How old is this one?" he asked, holding up the black bag.

"Only about two days old." said Will.

"Touch it." said Doctor Owens, holding out the bag. Will quickly glanced over at Hopper and Joyce before reaching out and taking the bag, opening it and letting the object inside drop onto his hand. To his surprise, the once liquidy slug was now rock hard,

"It's… solid?" said Will, confused. Owens nodded.

"Is it an egg?" asked Hopper, speaking up for the first time since they'd arrived about an hour ago.

"Possibly." said Owens, "I believe we need to perform an x-ray to really see what's going on in there. Then, we'll keep this," he picked up the object gingerly between his fingers, "under close watch." Once Will had been wheeled away for an x-ray, Joyce close behind, Doctor Owens hung back to talk to Hopper. "It's still alive." he said.

"What is? The demogorgon?" asked Hopper.

"The what? No, that place is crawling with life. Whatever the demogorgon is, it clearly didn't live alone." said Owens.

"But, Will didn't say there was anything else down there with him." said Hopper, still confused.

"Well, there must've been. The howling is constant." said Owens, walking out of the room to catch up with Will and Joyce. Hopper followed, trying to make sense of what the doctor had just told him.

"Has Will ever said anything about what else was in the upside down with him?" asked Hopper as they waited for Will to get out from the x-ray. Joyce had been pacing back and forth in front of the small window but stopped when Hopper spoke up.

"No. He doesn't say much about it. I can tell he's having a hard time but he won't tell me anything." said Joyce, sitting down next to Hopper with a sigh. "Maybe El will help him, she was there too. Why do you ask?"

"Doctor Owens said something weird. He said that the "howling" was constant."

"The howling?" Asked Joyce. Hopper shrugged,

"I don't know either." he said, sighing as he gazed at Wills small form through the glass. "How have you been?" he asked her suddenly. Joyce looked up at him before shrugging,

"I've been good. Obviously thrilled that I have Will back but it's hard to see him so sick." she responded. "How have you been?" she asked him, scooting closer on the small bench.

"Stressed mostly. This whole business with El is stressing me out the most. There's just so much we have to do and I don't know how to do it." he said.

"We can figure it out together." said Joyce, smiling and resting her hand on his. He smiled back but had no time to respond because at that moment a nurse walked in.

"He's out." she said shortly, walking out of the small room and closing the door behind her. Hopper and Joyce stood up quickly, their hands springing apart.

"I'm afraid it's not too good." said Owens, sitting on a swivel chair next to Will's bed. Joyce looked between the two worriedly. "His stomach is practically filled with them." Will turned even whiter than usual and Joyce sat down in the nearest chair.

"How do we get rid of them?" she asked.

"Well, we can perform an operation now if you'd like. Then we'll just dispose of the slugs after." said Owens. Joyce nodded,

"Anything to get rid of them. But when you're done, put them in a bag and give them back."

"Why?" asked Hopper.

"Because I'm going to burn them."

"Chief? Is something wrong?" asked Mrs. Wheeler.

"Oh no, I just wanted to tell you that Will is going to have an operation and will have to stay overnight. We- I mean Joyce, wanted to ask if you could let El stay until they get back. She promises to make it up to you." said Hopper. He had gone over as soon as he'd heard Will was staying the night. He didn't want El to be waiting for them.

"Of course! Are you going back right now? Would you like to go tell her yourself?" asked Karen.

"Uh, you can do it. I'd like to get back as soon as possible." he responded, glancing over his shoulder at his waiting car.

"Okay." said Karen kindly. "Well, tell Joyce I hope everything with Will goes well!"

"I will." called Hopper, already halfway to his car. Mrs. Wheeler closed the door behind him and went to find El and Mike, eventually finding them in the basement, sitting next to each other in the

blanket fort, laughing and talking to each other quietly.

"Hi." said Karen softly, not wanting to disturb them. "I wanted to tell you that Will has to have an operation and they won't be back until tomorrow."

"Is Will okay?" asked Mike and El in synchronization.

"I don't know." she responded, "would you like to invite your other friends to spend the night?" Mike said yes and took El upstairs to get his supercom. As Karen went back to making dinner, she thought about what she had just set up. Was it better for just El and Mike to have a sleepover or the whole group? she decided neither was overly appropriate and made a mental note to enlist Nancy to keep an eye on them. Suddenly, the sharp ring of the telephone shook her out of her thoughts. Before she could dry off her hands to get it, Mike came up the stairs and grabbed it,

"Hello?" he asked.

"Hi. Uh, is this the Wheeler house?" asked an unfamiliar voice on the other end. "It's Daniel, the new kid."

"Oh, hi, yes, it's Mike. What did you need? How did you get my number?"

"The phone book." said Daniel, laughing slightly. "And I was just wondering if you knew where Will was. I've been trying to call him all night and he hasn't picked up."

"He's actually having an operation right now. What was it that you needed from him?" asked Mike.

"Just some homework help. Is he okay? I mean, I've really no right to ask… we've only just met. But, I just felt such a connection and I've really taken a liking to him… I'm sorry, I'm rambling." Mike could hear the worry laced into the other boys tone and smiled in spite of the situation, he could hardly wait to tell Will how worried Daniel was for him.

"Oh no you're fine. And yes, he should be all right by Monday." said Mike.

"Okay, thanks for your help. Will you tell him that I'm thinking of him?" asked Daniel.

"Why don't you tell him yourself? Bye!" said Mike, happily, barely waiting for a reply before putting the phone down.

Daniel sighed. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Mike was totally on to him. What if he found out about his crush? Daniel collapsed into the chair beside the phone and rested his head on his hand, worried about Will but also trying to keep his (adorable) smiling face from invading his thoughts.

"Guys, that was Daniel on the phone!" said Mike into his supercom when he got back downstairs. "Get over here quick so I can tell you about it. Over."

"I'm just leaving my house now! Over." said Lucas, "and I have Dustin with me. Over." Mike put down the supercom and turned to El, who had been sitting quietly throughout all of this.

"Who is Daniel?" she asked.

"He's a new kid at our school. He's slightly tan, despite coming from the north, has blonde hair and thousands of freckles. He has these blue, green, and gold eyes that Will raves about." explained Mike.

"Why did he call you?" she asked, still confused.

"He was calling for Will. You know how boys and girls date?" he said. She nodded quietly, "well sometimes boys and boys or girls and girls date."

"Is that… okay?"

"It's great! See, Will likes boys and girls. A few years ago, he was crushing on a girl but now he seems pretty into this Daniel guy." said Mike.

"Oh. Does Daniel like him?"

"I think so." grinned Mike. El smiled slightly,

"Good." she whispered.

"He said he liked him?" said Lucas, for the third time already. Dustin, Lucas, Mike, and El were laying on their backs in a circle, staring at the ceiling and discussing the phone call.

"Yes." said Mike, rolling his eyes.

"But like, like him like him?"

"He said 'i've really taken a liking to him'. How much clearer do you want it?" said Mike, exasperated.

"A written statement, maybe." muttered Dustin. "We have to make sure that he's the right guy, y'know? We can't have our Will off with some guy we barely know."

"He seems nice enough." said Mike.

"I think I'll follow him home from school on Monday." said Dustin.

"You're going to do what?" said Lucas, eyebrows furrowed.

"What if he has some kind of weird after school ritual or like, i dunno a Phil Collins shrine or something." said Dustin, shrugging.

"What's wrong with Phil Collins?" whispered Mike.

"Can I come?" asked El. Dustin nodded,

"Of course." he said.

"I really hope Will is okay." sighed Mike. He lifted his left hand to run through his hair and when he dropped it back to the floor, it collided with El's. Before he could pull away, she clasped his hand tightly in hers. It was a good thing she couldn't see his face, it burned red even in the darkened room.

song: i want to break free by queen

6. heaven

hi! so this is a pretty plot heavy and crazy chapter. On google docs it's literally 12 pages long (you're in for a wild ride. Let's just say I totally almost cried writing the last scene).

chapter six

heaven

october thirty-first, 1984

Daniel looked in the mirror and sighed, he ran a hand through his hair and stared into his eyes, searching for some kind of comfort there. Today was the first day he'd see Will since they last talked. Though they'd never talked before that day, he'd been crushing on him since they first locked eyes on the first day of school. And they had talked *a lot* that day. After their chat in the hall, they spent all english class talking. He seemed familiar and warm and kind and talking to him only backed that up. He wasn't even sure he deserved such a sweet person. He took one more look at himself in the mirror before grabbing his bag and running out the door into his dads waiting car.

"Hey Will, wait up!" Will froze. He knew he was still pretty out of it from the surgery, but he was *sure* that was Daniel calling him. "Should you be at school?" was the first thing Daniel asked when he caught up to him. Will was distracted by Daniels pink cheeks, ruffled hair, and worried eyes and barely even questioned the fact that he knew something had happened.

"Probably not but I figured the only way my mom would let me go trick-or-treating is if I lied and said I was feeling up to coming." Will shrugged, beginning to walk with Daniel to their next class, english, which coincidentally, they shared. "She really didn't want me to go but I convinced her."

"But how do you feel?" asked the other boy, glancing at Will's small form.

"A little out of it." laughed Will, "how do you even know about it anyway?" asked Will. They had made it to class and took their usual seats in the back, far enough from the front of the class that their teacher barely noticed when they spent the whole time passing notes or laughing quietly with each other. They had become fast friends, having only formally known each other for less than a week.

"Mike told me. I was trying to call you but no one was picking up. Speaking of trick-or-treating, would it be alright if I tagged along? I know you all probably have coordinated costumes and already have plans but-"

"No, no, I'd love it if you came! I was actually going to ask if you wanted to come." said Will, smiling warmly. Daniel smiled back and they turned to the front of the class, trying to pay attention. Will quickly gave up on this idea and took out a lined piece of paper, grabbing a dark blue pen from his bag and scribbling a note for his friend: ***I was thinking of having everyone sleep over tonight? Would your parents be okay with that?*** He handed the note to the boy next to him and watched as he wrote out his response, this time in a dark green pen.

Yes. my dad should be fine with it. My mom died last year. That's why we moved, too many memories. He handed to paper to Will with a sad smile.

Oh, I'm so so sorry! My mom is also a single parent. My dad isn't dead but he's an ass (according to my brother) so we don't ever see him.

I'm sorry to hear that.

It's okay, yours is worse, at least I still have two parents.

Yeah

I'm sorry, that was rude wasn't it.

No, no, you're fine. So, what are going to be for halloween?

We're all dressing up as characters from* Ghostbusters*! We're not too sure about El yet but she did put a sheet over her head and call

herself a ghost the other day so she might be sticking with that haha

Cool! Who is El?

That's a long story but we'll all tell you tonight!

Okay!

Will smiled and put the paper away, determined to pay attention this time around.

"You invited him?" asked Lucas upon hearing the news that Daniel was joining them for trick-or-treating. Will shrugged,

"I'd like to get to know him better." he said. Lucas made kissing noises and Will threw a carrot at him, rolling his eyes. "You know what i meant."

"This is good! It means i can question him and not have to follow him home from school." said Dustin, casually. Will's eyebrows shot up and he shared a look with Mike. The other boy shrugged and continued eating.

"I kinda told him we'd tell him about El, though." said Will, after a brief silence fell over the table.

"Why? What are we supposed to say, 'hi this is Mike's cousin. They're kind of into each other but it's fine, they're *second* cousins.'" said Lucas, rolling his eyes. Will wrinkled his nose and Mike choked on his water,

"We're not *into each other*. Do we have to keep up with that cousins thing? It was fine but now it's just getting weird..." he spluttered.

"You two were holding hands with each other the other day and we all know it. Why are you even denying it anyway? She told us you kissed last year." said Dustin.

"She told you about that." said Mike, blushing. "And, I mean, yeah, I like her but I don't want to scare her off or freak her out or something. But then again, I did kind of tell her I wanted to take her on a date..." He realized how silly his outburst was and fell silent.

"'Not into each other' my ass." muttered Dustin.

"I'm going to have to tell El." sighed Will.

"About you and Daniel?" asked Mike. Will nodded. "Yeah, I already told her." he said.

"What? What did she say?" Will looked up abruptly, his eyes slightly panicked.

"Chill out, she was fine. She was actually really happy when I said the feeling was mutual." said Mike, shrugging.

"Oh." Will let out sigh he had been keeping in. His heart leapt a bit when Mike mentioned that their feelings were mutual. The boys had gone to visit Will at the lab the day before and teased him relentlessly when they told him about Daniel's call and his heart rate increased considerably on the monitor. He then changed the topic to their costumes and they spent the rest of lunch laughing and chatting about what they'd do that night.

El gently scooped up the cookie dough and moved it to the other counter, letting it roll off her hands and onto the floured surface. She was at the Wheeler's house for the day and was helping Karen make a batch of Halloween themed sugar cookies. Karen taught El how to properly roll out the dough and cut the shapes out with the cookie cutters so she left the younger girl do most of the work herself but kept watch from the kitchen table as she sewed the last few pieces on to Mike's costume.

"When will the boys be here?" asked El, her voice quiet as she concentrated intensely on moving the raw cookie down into the sheet pan without it crumbling.

"They should be getting out of school in an hour which is perfect; the cookies should be out and ready by then." replied Karen, smiling as she watched El hard at work, making cookies and trying to ward off a hungry Holly who was trying to get any scraps that she could. El, however, was running a tight ship and the most Holly got was a handful of flour, which severely disappointed the small girl.

Back at the school, the final bell had rung and Mike and his friends (plus Daniel) were walking to the front of the school, intending to drop Will off at Jonathans car and then bike to Mikes place, meeting Will there. This plan, however, was interrupted by none other than Mad Max herself, skateboarding up behind them as they walked across the parking lot.

"Hey, Mike! What do they call you? Frogface, right?" she called to them. Mike spun around,

"What do you want?" he asked, exasperated.

"I want to talk to that friend of yours, El. Where is she?" she asked.

"Uh, at my house I think." said Mike, taken aback by Max's blatant statement.

"Gross, are you guys siblings? Because I could *taste* the sexual tension between you two and I swear you were holding hands at some point and it wasn't in a sibling-like way." she said, wrinkling her nose.

"What?! No?! Her parents died and so she needs somewhere to stay. She lives with Will but comes over to my house during the day so Will's mom can go to work." explained Mike. The other boys were finding it very hard to contain their laughter as Mike tried to fix the mess of a conversation they were having.

"Do you have any plans for tonight?" asked Lucas, trying to bring the conversation away from… well, whatever it was.

"No, are you asking me out on a date, stalker?" asked Max, putting her hands on her hips.

"No, we're going to Mikes for dinner and then trick-or-treating and then Will's for a sleepover." explained Lucas. Max considered this for a moment before deciding on her answer.

"Fine. But it's only so I can get to know El. She seemed nice and I'm in need of friends." shrugged Max, "plus, anything that gets me away from my brother is good."

"Great!" said Mike, rolling his eyes. He didn't really want Max to

come over but he supposed he couldn't retract the offer so he stayed quiet. They continued to walk Will to his car and as soon as they got there Daniel suddenly remembered something important,

"I forgot my costume at home." he sighed. "Would it be a bother to drive me to my house quickly? It shouldn't be too far out of the way." he asked Will. Will grinned,

"I'd be glad to! It'll give everyone some time to get there anyway." Daniel nodded,

"Thanks!" he said, climbing into the back of the car as Will climbed into the passenger seat. They waved to their friends as Jonathan pulled out of his parking spot and started driving.

"Hi! I don't believe we've met." said the older boy, glancing at Daniel in the mirror.

"Jonathan, this is Daniel. Daniel, this is my brother Jonathan." said Will, introducing the two boys to each other. Daniel smiled warmly,

"Hi." he said. Will let his eyes flicker back to Daniel, his heart melting at the adorable smile on the other boys face. It took a minute to remember to tell Jonathan the change in plans and he shook his head, trying to think straight.

"We have to drive Daniel to his house first to grab his costume if that's alright. What's your address?" Will asked.

"It's 206 Rose ct." he responded.

"Oh, isn't that the street opposite Mike's?" said Will turning to his brother. Jonathan nodded,

"What time do you think I should pick you all up?" he asked. Will shrugged,

"Nine maybe? We'll have a lot of people coming along. There's me, El, Daniel, Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and possibly Max. I doubt we'll have room for everyone ." said Will, listing people off on his fingers.

"Wow, that's quite the party you've got going." said Jonathan. "I hope

you won't be up too late." he said, grinning. "Mom wanted me to relay that message to you. She also wanted me to watch over you but I figured you needed a little space to just hang with your friends without constant supervision. " he said.

"It's been received, loud and clear." laughed Will. "and thank you, what are you doing tonight?"

"Nancy is forcing me to go a party." said Jonathan, rolling his eyes. "And, she's going with Steve so it's not like I'll have anyone to hang out with when they're making out in a corner somewhere or something." he sighed. Will said something in response but it went unnoticed by Daniel, who was quietly sitting in the back enjoying the brotherly banter. "Hey did you see that?"

Will shook his head, "no, what was it?"

"The Chiefs car. He turned onto the road that leads to our house." said Jonathan, his gaze flicking off of the road for half a second to look out the side window.

"Oh." said Will, "Is mom okay?" Jonathan rolled his eyes,

"She's fine, all the better for seeing him I'm sure." he said bitterly.

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Will, mulling over his brothers comment in his mind.

"I'm not one-hundred percent on this yet; but let's just say that they're quite a bit closer than they were before." replied Jonathan. Will mouthed a silent "oh" before falling into silence. He had never considered his mother dating anyone before but he figured that it was always going to happen at some point. Daniel listened quietly, he had yet to encounter this situation. His mother had only died last year and his father had barely glanced at another woman since.

Hopper stood outside of the Byers' home, waiting for Joyce to open the door. He knew they'd be alone since he saw both Will and Jonathan in the car driving away from the house so he didn't hesitate to firmly press his lips against Joyce's as soon as the door opened.

"Hi." she whispered softly, as soon as they parted.

"Hi." he murmured.

"So, to what do I owe this pleasure?" she asked, taking his hand and leading him into the house, closing the door behind them. She was still surprised by his sudden move but it didn't come as a complete shock, they had been dating for a few months, completely unbeknownst to the town. She had wanted to tell her children but decided that the Upside Down was still to fresh in Will's mind for such a shock.

"I just wanted to see you… alone. I also brought candy for anyone who happens to get lost and end up all the way out here." he said, lifting up his right hand which was carrying a big bag of candy he'd bought on the way over. Joyce playfully hit his shoulder,

"Don't be such a tease." she said, laughing at his dig about her house. "People do come out here to trick-or-treat, y'know. But thanks, the other candy is in the kitchen if you want to go put yours with it." he nodded, stealing another long kiss before she pushed him away gently and towards the kitchen.

"Can you even see out of that?" asked Will, stepping back to admire his handiwork. El was standing in front of him, a sheet over her head and trying to see out of two small holes Will had just cut into it.

"Not really." she said.

"They need to be bigger." said Mike, taking the scissors from his friends hand and gently taking the sheet away from El's face, as to not cut her. He cut the holes so they were big enough that El could easily see through it. When he was done, El stepped back, twirling in a circle to show everyone her completed costume, simple as it was. Everyone else was also dressed in their costumes: Mike, Will, Dustin, and Lucas were all in their Ghostbusters costumes, Max was in her Michael Myers mask, and Daniel had changed into his costume, Yoda.

"Did you make that costume yourself?" asked Will over dinner. They were all sat around the table and both the Yoda head and Max's mask were sitting on the couch next to the bags they were taking trick-or-treating. Daniel nodded,

"I usually make my own costumes every year." he said, "my dad helps sometimes but my mom used to help me the most. She was the one who taught me how to make clothes." He shot Will a sad smile, which he returned before responding,

"That's cool! Maybe you can teach me how to do it too." said Will, still smiling at the boy across from him.

"I'd like that." he responded, smiling back. They sat there, smiling at each other for at least a minute before Mike interrupted them,

"Oooookay," he began awkwardly, "Will, did Jonathan say when he was coming to pick us up?" said Mike, trying to distract the boy from his crush.

"Uh, yeah. He said he could pick us up around nine. Max, do you think you'll come?" asked Will, turning away from Daniel and towards the girl sitting next to him. Max shrugged,

"Why not. I'll have to borrow some of your clothes though." she said, gesturing to El with her fork. El shrugged,

"That's okay." she said. She then turned to Daniel, the only one at the table she didn't know. "What's your favorite book?" she asked him. Daniel, not expecting the sudden question, stumbled over his answer,

"Well, uh, I'm a pretty big Sherlock Holmes fan." he responded. El grinned widely,

"Me too!" she said. The two then started going off about the Sherlock Holmes books and Will grinned, Daniel was just so likeable.

"Aren't you supposed to be with Steve?" asked Jonathan. Since arriving at the halloween party, he'd done nothing but stand in a corner, sipping on a cup of punch that obviously had ridiculous amounts of alcohol in it.

"Yeah, well, he's currently in pretty rough fight with that asshole, Billy." said Nancy, rolling her eyes and crossing her arms.

"Aww, you're not going to go patch him up after he loses?" teased Jonathan. Nancy laughed,

"No, he got himself into this mess, he can get himself out. Besides, he's pissing me off." she sighed, taking the cup out of Jonathan's hand and drinking the rest in one gulp. Jonathan raised his eyebrows and pried the cup out of her fingers,

"Let's not drown our sorrows, care to dance instead?" he held out his hand and smiled at her. She forced herself to smile back and took his hand, letting herself get dragged out on to the dance floor. Half an hour later, Nancy was quite a bit drunker than she had been before and Jonathan was still sober, needing to drive all the kids home later. They found themselves sitting next to each other on one of the couches, surrounded by plastic cups and barely talking due to the fact that they could barely hear each other anyway.

"You know," began Nancy slowly, "I really like to spend time with you."

"I like spending time with you too. And even though last year was so awful, I'm glad it led to us becoming closer." said Jonathan.

"Mhm, closer." whispered Nancy. Suddenly, she began leaning in closer. So close in fact, that Jonathan could smell the alcohol on her breath.

"Nancy," he said, gently putting his hands on her shoulders, stopping her from going any closer. "We can't."

"Why not?" she asked, irritated.

"Well for starters, you have a boyfriend. You're also pretty drunk and I don't want you to do anything you'll regret." he explained gently. She glared at him and stormed off, leaving a confused boy behind her.

"A… haunted house?" asked El, staring up at the towering house in front of her.

"Yeah. The Shaws put one on every year. They just decorate their house and get their kids to jump out at people. It's weirdly scary for something so homemade." mused Will, walking up to stand next to El.

"But what is it?" she asked, concerned.

"It's like a normal house, but with scary decorations and people who jump out and try to scare you." explained Dustin. "I can go in with you if you want." Mike quickly jumped into their conversation,

"Or you could go with me." he interjected. Dustin rolled his eyes while El looked between the two of them.

"We could all go in together." she said eventually. Mike agreed hesitantly, making sure to grab her hand as they walked towards the house together. Dustin followed, looking back at his remaining friends and rolled his eyes. Lucas grinned at him and watched as Dustin trailed after the other two.

"Uh, Max, do you want to go in with me?" asked Lucas. She stared him down for a moment before responding,

"Okay. Only if you promise to not hold my hand." she said. Lucas shrugged, a little dejectedly but agreed nonetheless.

"So, I guess that leaves us." said Daniel, glancing over at Will. The other boy smiled shyly,

"Mhm." They walked in together and immediately were met with a shrill scream and then Mikes voice from upstairs,

"Dustin! You scared her." Will burst into laughter and didn't even jump when someone jumped out at them as they walked into the kitchen. Daniel however, did jump and grabbed Will's hand as a reflex. He immediately realized what he'd done and tried to pull away. Will noticed this tightened his grip. It felt so good to hold his hand and he didn't ever want to let go.

"I mean, they're trying I guess." said Max, as another hooded figure jumped out at her and Lucas, only managing to scare one of them. "It's too predictable." she said, shrugging.

"Well, you're fun." said Lucas, rolling his eyes.

"Just telling the truth, stalker." she said, grinning at him. When he jumped for the third time, he fell over and landed on the ground with

a crash. Max held back laughter as she helped Lucas stand up but quickly lost control and the both of them descended into giggles.

Listen lovebirds, I know you love to hold hands and be all lovey-dovey but what about me, eh?" began Dustin. They were halfway through the tour and it was time he intervened. Besides, their hands were probably getting sweaty from all that hand holding anyway.

"Dustin what are you doing?" asked Mike as Dustin wedged his way between himself and El, pulling their hands apart.

"Leave a little room for me." he said, taking El's hand in his right and Mike's in his left. El looked down at his hand for a moment before shrugging and looking up. She was fine for a few moments before someone jumped out in front of her and she slipped into the Upside Down once again, her thoughts delving where she didn't want them to go.

Her feet hurt from running. The coarse dirt pounded at her as she ran, shoeless towards the house in the distance. She knew she'd be safe there as she'd visited many times before. She swung the door open and shut it with a bang behind her, searching around frantically for something to block the door. The howling got louder and louder as she pushed a chair under the doorknob and went to hide under the stairs. She closed her eyes, wishing with all her might that Mike would walk down the stairs instead of whatever monster was outside the door. After a few minutes of silence, she creeped out of her hiding spot and up the two flights of stairs, stopping at Mike's bedroom door and pushing the door open gently. Inside, a green ooze was coming through the window and the room was in total disarray. This didn't deter her however, and she climbed into his bed, pulling the tattered blanket up to her chin and closing her eyes, letting her tears fall down her cheeks and soak the blanket. The next morning after crying herself to sleep (the first time she'd actually slept since arriving in the upside down), she set out for the lab. She knew where the gate was and she was certain she could make it out of the lab without anyone seeing.

"You okay?" asked Mike, softly touching her shoulder. He and Dustin had taken El aside when she had gone into a trance and were carefully watching her.

"Yeah, sorry." she whispered.

"That's okay." said Dusting, smiling at her. "Ready to keep going? We're almost done, Will and Daniel passed us a minute ago but we made them keep going. I saw that they were holding hands." he said, wiggling his eyebrows as he took El's hand. El smiled,

"Good." she said quietly, taking Mike's hand in her free hand.

Will laughed as Lucas told them about his fall earlier. They were standing outside, waiting for Mike, Dustin, and El. Will and Daniel were still holding hands and Lucas and Max had most certainly noticed. They shared several smirks as the two gently swung their arms, fingers intertwined. However, they weren't the only ones who noticed this. Mike, Dustin, and El were just walking out of the house when a boy who was in their grade caught sight of Will and Daniel. He laughed loudly and muttered something to his friend before shouting rude and derogatory words at the boys.

Will and Daniel looked at each other before letting their hands fall apart, both taking a big step apart. Will's world immediately began to crumble. His friends began flickering, the Upside Down trying to sneak in during his moment of weakness. Will stood strong and pushed those thoughts away. *Not now, not now.* He thought desperately, tightening his grip on the bag in his hand. The last thing he needed was to go into the Upside Down now, in front of everyone. He eventually won his mental fight and opened his eyes to see Lucas looking at him, concerned, Mike holding back Dustin who was shouting angrily at the boy, and El who was looking on, confused. She understood that whatever that boy had said was bad due to everyone's reaction but she didn't understand why.

"Are you okay?" El asked Will gently, as they made their way down the street. They decided to continue trick-or-treating for a few more houses, hoping to make the night a bit better.

"Of course he's not okay!" scoffed Dustin, "What an asshole." he muttered as an afterthought.

"I'm… fine." he said with a sigh. "How are you?" he asked Daniel. The other boy had been quiet but had laughed at a joke Lucas had told a moment before, trying to lighten the mood.

"I'm alright. It's awful but it's not the first time it's happened to me." he said with a shrug.

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's not really the first time for me either. Once I, uh, overheard my dad talking to my mom and he called me… a... actually, i'm not going to repeat it." he said quietly. El looked at him sadly, taking his hand in hers.

"It's okay." she whispered softly.

"Come on guys, Ms. Williams lives up there and she always has the best candy." said Lucas, trying to bring up everyone's mood. They all smiled at each other and tried to move on for the moment.

"Guys, I don't think we have enough seats." said Jonathan, stepping away from the car and running a hand through his hair. There were three seats in the back and one in the front (besides the driver's seat) and there were seven of them. "I think we should have two up in the passenger's seat and everyone else can just pile in." he decided.

"I'll sit in the passenger's seat." offered Will. "El, do you want to sit with me?" he asked the girl standing next to him. His first thought was to ask Daniel but after what had happened a few minutes ago, he wasn't sure. El nodded and they went and sat down, El sitting on Wills lap. They turned around slightly to see everyone else squish in together before taking off, Jonathan making sure to drive extra carefully due to the fact that he was the only one wearing a seatbelt.

"They're going to be back soon." said Joyce. She and Hopper were cuddled on the couch, close enough to the door that one of them could quickly go give out candy without having to stand outside all night.

"I'll move to the chair if I hear anyone coming." he said, smiling down at her. "I'm pretty sure Jonathan is on to us anyway."

"Really?" she asked.

"He seemed pretty suspicious about me sleeping over the other day." he replied, shrugging.

"Oh. So, do the police not need you this evening? I have been keeping

you here for awhile." said Joyce, trying to change the subject.

"Nope. I told them I'd be busy all night and they could only interrupt me if someone was murdered, or something along those lines." She tried to respond but was silenced when he began to kiss her gently. They barely noticed the noise of the car approaching and probably would have continued on had the headlights not flashed into the room through the window, bathing everything in bright white. Joyce and Hopped immediately jumped apart and Hopper practically flew to the chair while Joyce fixed her hair and fell back into the couch to make it appear that they'd been simply talking the whole time.

Will lay awake. So many thoughts raced around his head he could barely keep up with them. He let his head loll to one side and was met with the sweet sleeping face of Daniel, his soft curls falling over his eyes and his lips parted slightly. Will squeezed his eyes shut and looked away, turning over so he faced the wall. He thought back to how he'd spoken and acted around Daniel the past few days. He knew he'd never thought any of the thoughts he'd had about Daniel with Mike, Lucas, or Dustin. I mean, he once thought about how it would feel to press his lips against the other boy's. Was it wrong? He was so lost in the joy and curiosity of it all he didn't even stop to think; how much was too much? Were those things that boy and his dad said about him true? He tried to think back into his childhood, he never remembered his mother or father bringing up gay people. Or anyone for that matter. It was taboo, unspoken and unaddressed. But what about girls? He had had a crush on a girl before and it seemed as genuine as this, except with no real chance of anything happening. He rolled over again, this time with his face into his pillow. He sighed loudly. So loudly, that El woke up from her spot in her blanket fort. She padded over to him quietly before sitting down softly on the bed, the mattress sagging beneath her.

"El?" he asked, on the verge of tears. He saw her silhouette nod before she laid down facing Will, placing her hand on his shoulder.

"What's wrong?" she asked, noticing a tear slip down his face.

"I was just- just thinking about my… sexuality. You might not understand bu-"

"Do you love boys?" she asked quietly. Another tear.

"I don't know." he choked. "I've been so caught up in the feeling of being with Daniel, I didn't even stop to consider if what I was doing was wrong." he was fully crying now, his words coming out with hiccups.

"Will, It's not wrong to love." she said softly. "I grew up with a monster but since escaping, I've experienced so many kinds of love. It doesn't matter if you love girls or boys or both, it just matters what kind of person they are." it was the most she'd said for awhile and Will laughed softly at that fact before giving her a big hug,

"I love you." he told her.

"I love you too." she replied, hugging him back.

song: heaven by troye sivan
(It's been added to my ud&ba spotify playlist ;))

hello again! so I know notes at the end of chapters is annoying but I really wanted to discuss what happened in this chapter. Questioning your sexuality is never as easy as books or movies can make it seem sometimes and I also think that questioning who you are is a big part of being a teen. We're all trying to find our place in the world and it's hard and frustrating but we all make it to the other side eventually! Okay I'm done (also, you're welcome for the Jopper)

7. boxes

chapter seven

boxes

november first, 1984

Will awoke to the early morning light spilling in through the window and into his eyes. He groaned and rolled over when he remembered that it was Tuesday and he had to get to school. He sat in bed for a few minutes more, absentmindedly patting Daisy before he woke up his friends. Once he had gotten all his friends up and they had taken turns getting dressed and brushing their teeth in the bathroom they went out into the kitchen. To Will's surprise, Hopper was at the stove making eggs while his mom was at the sink, washing dishes from their dinner the night before. Lucas glanced over at Will and raised his eyebrows, obviously hinting at the fact that Hopper probably slept over. They couldn't know for sure because they all went to bed not long after they got home the night before, knowing they had school the next morning.

"Hi mom." began Will, after rolling his eyes at Lucas.

"Oh, Hi sweetie." she replied, turning around to smile at them.

"Hi," began Hopper, "I made everyone an egg and there's toast in the toaster." he told them.

"Uh, thank you." said Will, still slightly confused on why he was still there. He ushered his friends over to the table and soon everyone, including Hopper, his mom, and Jonathan, were all sat at the table quietly eating. That was until Will decided he needed to talk to Daniel, right at that moment. "Daniel." he started nervously, "I need to apologize."

"What for?" asked Daniel, placing his fork down to look at the boy across from him.

"Because after what… happened," he chose his words carefully, not

wanting his mom to ask too many questions. "I didn't really talk to you for the rest of the night. I, uh, talked to El about it and mostly came to terms with my problem. I just wanted to tell you because I didn't want you to think it scared me away or something." he said it quickly, the words spilling out and not all of them making complete sense.

"That's okay, I didn't think you'd been scared away, you're too brave for that." said Daniel, gently. Again, they forgot they were in a room full of people and smiled warmly at each other before Dustin cleared his throat.

"Guys, please, just eat your eggs." he said, laughing slightly. They laughed with him as Joyce shared a look with Hopper, the both of them raising their eyebrows at the exchange.

"What was that?" asked Hopper, as soon as Jonathan drove out of the driveway, all the kids in tow. Even El, who was going to the Wheelers for the day.

"I don't know. What could have happened to them?" asked Joyce, suddenly nervous. "I don't like that he's keeping things from me. I ought to ask Jonathan…" she muttered, flopping down on the couch.

"Well there's that, and then there's the way they looked at each other. Do you think…" said Hopper, going to sit next to his girlfriend. She sighed before letting her head fall into her hands,

"I don't know. I just want him to be okay." she said. After a few seconds she lifted her head up again. "So, when do you need to get back to work?" she asked him, trying to change the subject.

"Oh, whenever." he said, smiling at her.

"What was the homework again?" asked Mike, staring at his blank sheet of lined paper at lunch. They were sitting at the outside tables and the wind was gently blowing, causing Mike to sigh in annoyance as his paper almost flew away for the third time.

"You had to write an essay on what you did over the summer, it was due," Will counted out the weeks on his fingers, "about a month ago.

Why are you only doing it now?"

"I'm a bit behind." said MIke, rolling his eyes. "And anyways, why do they always ask us what we did over summer?!" he exclaimed, "What do they want me to say, 'I looked for my friend who might have died and hung out with my friends.'" a group of passing girls looked at him strangely before walking away.

"That'd make a pretty interesting essay." commented Dustin.

"Yeah but they'd probably fail me. 'Imagination' doesn't get you very far in an essay about what you did over the summer. Trust me, I've tried." said Mike, rolling his eyes again.

"It's okay," said Daniel, speaking up for the first time. "I didn't do that essay either."

"Oh look who it is." said Lucas, cocking his head to the left. Mike, Dustin, and Will quickly turned their heads to see what he was looking at and were met with the unfortunate sight of Troy and his friends.

"Hey, fairy boy!" called Troy, walking up to their table and standing on the opposite side of Will, so they were staring each other in the face. "I heard about your little hand-holding incident. Oh, and look who it is," he sniggered, turning to look at Daniel "the other gay." Dustin and Lucas, the two boys closest to him looked at each other, fuming. Daniel swore under his breath and jumped up immediately. Dustin and Lucas seemed to have a silent conversation and looked at each other, nodding before getting up and turning to face Troy. "oh, what do we have here? Are midnight and toothless going to fight me?"

Steve Harrington had been walking around the school for over an hour. He'd skipped his current class, math, and opted instead for a nice walk around campus. He had walked all the way to the middle school courtyard, connected to the back of the cafeteria, when he saw Will, sitting alone at a table while his friends appeared to be facing off to Troy. Even at the highschool people knew this guy was an ass. He began fast walking towards them but was too late as he saw the first punches being thrown.

"No, we all are." said Mike, standing up to join Lucas, Dustin, and Daniel. Will sighed and let his head fall into his hands as he watched the scene unfold. Dustin threw the first punch, hitting Troy straight in the jaw while Daniel punched him on the other side of his stumbled back and Lucas kicked him in the shin as Mike pushed him roughly. Only then did Steve get to them and while he made a mental promise to scold the younger kids later, he did throw in a little,

"Stay away from them, brat."

Troy fell over and clutched at his jaw, whimpering and scouting away from them, probably to go get a teacher.

"Oh that felt good!" cheered Dustin, high fiving all his friends. Will stood up and walked over to them, trying to stay serious but happy on the inside that his friends loved him enough to beat someone up on his behalf.

"Thanks for coming to the rescue, Steve. But guys, I really shouldn't have let you do that." said Will, a grin playing at his lips.

"You're welcome. I tried to get here as fast as possible, what did he say anyway?" said Steve.

Will sighed and began to explain when suddenly someone interrupted him.

"Boys!" a loud and clear voice shouted from the door. They all turned to see the principal. Her face was contorted in anger and she had a bruised and beaten Troy lurking behind her. The four boys all looked nervously at each other and walked in defeat to meet her at the door, kids smirking at them as they passed. "I've already called all of your parents and when they arrive I expect a full report on what happened. I've got Troy's but I'd like to hear both sides of the story." she said as soon as they'd all settled down in the office.

"And I'd like to hear his side of the story." muttered Lucas under his breath.

"What was that Mr. Sinclair?" asked the principle, her eyebrows raised.

"Nothing Ms. Anderson, sorry." said Lucas, trying to look as innocent as possible. It wasn't long before all the parents were there. Both of Lucas' parents left work to come to the school and even though Mike's father wasn't able to make it he was sure he'd have to retell it all at home anyway. Karen had brought along El and Holly, who were both sitting quietly a few seats away from Troy, El glancing between her friends nervously. Daniels dad was sat in the back by Hopper, who was brought along by Joyce. Steve was also awkwardly hovering in the corner, he didn't really know anything but got dragged to the office against his will by Ms. Anderson.

"Why are the police here?" asked Troy, annoyed.

"To keep you in check." said Hopper, fixing Troy with a hard look.

"So," began Ms. Anderson, "I'd like one of you to tell me exactly what happened out there."

"I'll do it. I'm the one who didn't stop it." said Will, speaking up before anyone got a chance.

"Thank you Will." said the principal, taking out a sheet of paper to take notes on. "When Troy walked up to you five, what did he say to incite such a response?"

"He-he called me 'fairy boy'." said Will quietly. Daniel and Joyce to turned to glare at Troy while Ms. Anderson simply raised her eyebrows,

"And he nicknamed you that because…"

"He thinks I'm gay." said Will flatley, "But that was only the beginning. When Lucas, Daniel, and Dustin went to confront him, he called Lucas 'midnight' and Dustin 'toothless'. That's when Mike joined in. He calls Mike 'frogface' but didn't get the chance this time because Dustin and Daniel punched him in the jaw." said Will, explaining the situation. Now, all the parents were murmuring angrily.

"I'm just pointing out the truth." said Troy, smirking.

"Please Troy, no comments." said Ms. Anderson, sighing. "Now, Troy

didn't include those rude nicknames in his account but did say that all four of you punched and kicked him multiple times and Will was cheering you on from the sides. Does any of this ring true?"

"No!" said Dustin, irritated, "I punched him once, Lucas kicked him in the shins, Mike pushed him to the ground, and Daniel punched him again. Will, on the other hand, looked like he'd rather be anywhere else." The other boys muttered along in agreement.

"Okay. Dustin, Lucas, Daniel, and Mike, you will have three days of suspension for physical violence. Will, you'll have two for not stepping in, and Troy will have two for bullying." she said simply, referring to a sheet she had laminated on her desk, "And Steve, I haven't any idea what you're doing out of class but if I give you a pass and you promise me you'll go straight back to whatever class you were in then I'll pretend it never happened."

"Thanks." Muttered Steve.

"Only two days?" said Daniel, clearly angry, "he was blatantly homophobic and racist."

"Sorry, I don't make the rules." she said, shrugging.

"That's bullshit." muttered Daniel, walking out of the room angrily.

"Language!" called his dad as Ms. Anderson said,

"Don't make me make your suspension four days!"

"Can we go now?" asked Mike, crossing his arms.

Will watched on silently, and before he knew it the room started flickering. Ms. Anderson's reply was drowned out as Will got sucked into the upside down. He shuddered, almost every night he dreamt of the upside down but this was different, he truly felt like he was there. He stood up and walked to the door, opening it and looking both ways. He heard a terrifying shriek coming from outside and slammed the door, running to the corner of the office and pulling his knees up to his chest. A few months ago he might have gone out, thinking it was a dream and that he's wake up fine the next morning. He'd learnt his lesson when he accidentally cut his finger in the upside down and

came about a few minutes later with a bleeding finger. He leant his head against the wall behind him, his whole body shaking from nerves. He didn't think he could die in these little hallucinations but he could get hurt and he really wasn't in the mood for adventuring. He looked around the room while he waited to get taken back into the real world. He found that making himself completely calm often did the trick so he took a few deep breaths and closed his eyes. His heart fluttered as he felt something slimy touch his hand but he shook the feeling off, think of El's soft breaths when she slept on the floor of his room and how Daniels face lit up when they saw each other in the hallway and when he and his friends got together and hung out and played games and Daisy running up to him every day after school, her whole body wagging from excitement. He let these feelings and memories wash over him like ocean waves as he lay content on the sandy shore and soon he felt his heartbeat begin to slow and the world around him begin to melt away, replaced by the worried face of his mother and the faces of his friends peeking around her.

"Hi." he murmured.

"Will! Are you okay?" asked his mom nervously. This hadn't been the first time something like this had happened but it had been the first time in public. Ms. Anderson looked on, confused, but Will paid her no attention as he suddenly had the need to throw up.

"Excuse me." he muttered, standing up suddenly, a little wobbly due to the head rush, and ran out of the room, barely making it to the bathroom before throwing up, thankfully not slugs this time. He looked at himself in the mirror and cringed. His skin was pale and the bags under his eyes were prominent. He made his way slowly back to the office and was happily surprised to find Daniel there, talking quietly to his dad. "Oh, hey." he said, walking up to the curly haired boy. Daniel turned around and grinned at the sound of his voice,

"Oh, hey." he responded, "hold up, what happened to you?" he asked, the smile sliding off his face as he gazed into Will's tired eyes.

"Nothing," lied Will, "I just, uh, this fight just really took it out of me."

"Oh." Daniel wasn't sure he believed his story but didn't fight it, Will really did look out of it.

They left soon after; Mike, Lucas, and Dustin promised to check up on Will that afternoon and Daniel simply smiled at him and said he'd call later. After Will, Joyce, and El had dropped off Jim at the station and he had promised to see his mom later, Will brought up a question that had been weighing him down,

"Mom," he brought up carefully, thankful he had moved to the front seat so he could see her reaction, "I've noticed that Hopper has spent a lot of time around our house and uh, Jonathan was talking to me yesterday and he mentioned that he thought you two were, um, more than friends." his words came out fast and choppy. El, sitting in the back, widened her eyes in surprise and looked between Will and Joyce, trying to read their faces.

"Oh, Will, I'm so sorry." said Joyce, after a moment's silence. "I really was going to tell you. It's just, you've been going through a bit of a rough patch and I figured the last thing you needed was your mother dating the police chief." she laughed softly. Will took this in quietly, finally coming to a conclusion,

"That's okay, and I'm glad I know now. But, can you promise to tell me if anything happens?" he said.

"I promise you'll be the first to know when anything happens." she said gently, smiling at him.

"Hey El, guess what?" exclaimed Will, bouncing into his bedroom an hour later.

"What?" she asked, looking up from the book she was reading, curled up in her fort with Daisy cuddled up next to her.

"The builders are coming tomorrow to start your room!" he said. El's face split into a grin and clapped, "I don't think they're going to start actually building but they're going to make sure it can go right next to mine and they'll probably start figuring out how much materials they need and- well, you get the point."

"I'm so excited!" she said, grinning and setting her book down.

"Hey, do you want to do some of my science homework with me? We've still got a few hours before Lucas, Dustin, and Mike come over and I think Steve and Nancy might be coming over too."

"Why Steve and Nancy?" asked El, he brows furrowed.

"Jonathan has a project with the both of them." he said with a laugh. El mouthed 'oh' and leant back into the pillows, letting her fingers drag through Daisy's soft fur as Will went to get his science homework. Unbeknownst to El, Will was trying to prepare her for next year. He knew it would take a lot more than just letting her do some of his homework to prepare her for joining school, but he figured he could leave the hard part to his mom and Hopper who appeared to be working on it. Suddenly, a shrill ring filled the room and Will jumped up, "Daniel!" he said.

"Oh, go get it!" said El, "I'll stay here with Daisy." Will gave the dog one more pat before leaving his room and walking to get the telephone.

"Hey." said Will gently.

"Hey. how are you feeling?" asked Daniel.

"Not the best." laughed Will, "I could do with a little picker-upper."

"I can do that. Meet me in the flower field by the train tracks in ten minutes." said Daniel, after a moment's hesitation. He had a feeling that what he was going to tell Will would make him just a bit happier. Will laughed, bringing him out of his thoughts.

"Okay, silly, I'll be there in ten. Don't be late." he teased, smiling widely.

"Bye, see you then!" said Daniel, hanging up the phone and dashing into the other room to tell his dad where he was going. Elsewhere, Will was doing the same thing. He stumbled into the living room, still smiling,

"Hi, is it okay if I go out for a few minutes? Daniel asked if we could

meet in the field next to the train tracks." said Will.

"I guess, that's kind of a random place to meet though. Do you want to bring El?" asked his mom. Will considered this but finally decided that he wanted to be alone with Daniel for once,

"No I'll be fine. I really trust him." he told her.

"I-" began Joyce.

"Thanks mom, love you!" he called, running outside to get his bike. Joyce smiled softly. Though she was concerned for her sons well-being, she had met Daniel and didn't really think he posed much of a threat.

The boys arrived at the field at the same, grinning at each other as they pulled up next to each other on the sidewalk, right before the turn onto the dirt path, leading to the field.

"So, what do you have to cheer me up?" asked Will, once they had settled into a patch of colorful flowers, sitting across from each other, knees almost touching. It was around two pm and the swish of the wind in the grasses and the soft din of bugs buzzing surrounded them.

"Well I'm hoping it'll cheer you up." said Daniel with a nervous laugh. "Basically, I've formally known you for less than two weeks and you've changed my life in so many ways. I-I never knew that I could feel this way with someone. Every morning, I wake up, knowing that I'll get to see you, and talk to you, you make me so happy." Daniel had his hands clenched in his lap and he was watching Wills reaction carefully. At first, he wasn't sure what Will was thinking, but when a smile broke out on his face and a tear came to his eye, he knew he'd done the right thing.

Will's brain was in shambles. He barely knew what to think. A part of him wanted to come back to Daniel with an equally kind proclamation and another part of him wanted to kiss him right then and there. After thinking about it for a few seconds he decided to go with the latter. He placed a hand on Daniels leg and leaned forward, slowly pressing his lips onto the other boy's.

Daniel was not expecting this and his hands fell limp, eventually finding a place on Will's shoulders. The kiss, soft and sweet, lasted less than a few seconds and when they parted they rested their foreheads together, smiling contently.

song: boxes by the goo goo dolls
(go check out my spotify playlist for all these songs! it's bella_is_a_tardis)

SO, THE KISS. when I first started this story, I decided I wanted Dill (Daniel + Will's ship name lmao) to kiss at the snowball for the first time. I eventually realized that probably wasn't the best idea and settled for this instead (there will still be cute, fluffy scenes at the snowball, worry not) so yep! you're welcome

also Steve is here now! mom Steve is on the way

8. when the water meets the mountains

hi everyone! we hit 1,000 hits *woo hoooo*! so, I feel like I should clarify a bit on Daniel. His hair was mostly inspired by Finn Elliot in his role as young Philip in The Crown. His looks were mostly inspired by Simon Snow from Carry On (which is so helpful, I know, considering it's a book). So basically a mix between Finn Elliot and Troye Sivan (here's a good fan art haha .nz/pin/361765782557569367/). Obviously Daniel is supposed to be 13-almost-14 so he'd look a bit younger but that's a good guide (It's also a good pic for the hair-as that's how I've imagined it). NOW, I know a bit part of reading is how yOU imagine the characters so if you like your picture of him better then you can just ignore this lol. ENJOY!

chapter eight

when the water meets the mountains

"You kissed him?!" said Dustin, a little too loudly.

"Shush! Yes, I did." said Will, a dreamy look on his face. It was later that afternoon after Daniel and Will had parted ways and Will's friends came over, accompanied by Steve and Nancy who were working on their project with Jonathan. It was really only Nancy and Jonathan's project, seeing as Steve was a year above them, but he tagged along anyway. How well they were working on it however, was up for interpretation as all five friends kept hearing raised voices from the room across the hall. Will had just told them everything that had happened since they'd last seen each other at the school.

"Well… are you guys dating?" asked Lucas. Will shrugged, a slight blush on his cheeks.

"We, uh, didn't discuss that." he said. The other boys raised their eyebrows and exchanged looks, which went unnoticed by Will. It was a few minutes before Mike reminded them that he had brought along their D&D game. They had only had time to play once during the past week or so and they still had a lot of their campaign left.

"That is *not* how you conjugate avoir." said Steve, rolling his eyes.

They were working on their french project, a poster board about a french king or queen of their choice.

"Well, then how do you do it?" asked Nancy, obviously annoyed at her boyfriend.

"It's nous *avons* not nous *avez*." he said, rolling his eyes. "Don't you remember french 1? They practically drilled it into our heads."

"Oh, sorry I can't remember something that happened almost three years ago. Seriously, Steve, you aren't even apart of this project!" said Nancy, her voice a little louder than it had been a moment before. Jonathan was trying his hardest to stay out of their little fight and had taken to the corner where he was cutting out pictures they needed to glue on.

"Why are you taking french anyway, Steve?" said Jonathan, "I wouldn't have really thought it was your cup of tea."

"Well, it was mostly my parents in the beginning. After the first year though, I took a bit of a liking to it. Why? Think it's a little too feminine for me?" he said. Jonathan raised his eyebrows,

"Uh, no, I didn't say that at all." he responded, concentrating harder on his cutting task. Steve rolled his eyes, letting it go and trying to block out Jonathan.

november second, 1984

Cicadas buzzed gently outside the window as Will's lamp softly glowed on his bedside table, basking the room in a soft yellow glow, minus the light filtering through his curtains. It was around nine in the morning and Will was the only one up, enjoying the silence as he cuddled with Daisy; the dog calmly laying in his arms. He was considering how to ask Daniel if they were dating. Thankfully, he didn't need to think for long as a sudden shrill ring filled the house. Daisy jumped up and ran from the room, accidentally trampling Dustin on her way out. He swore quietly and rolled over, placing his pillow over his head to block the light that was now spilling on to Will's floor. Will jumped up after Daisy, determined to get to the phone before anyone else did. When he picked it up, he didn't even

bother waiting for the other person to speak before breathing out a soft,

"Daniel?"

"That's me. How are you, Will?" asked Daniel, smiling.

"Pretty good. Better if I could see you." said Will, leaning up against the wall.

"Aw, you beat me to it. I was *just* about to ask if you wanted to meet me. Same spot as yesterday, in about, uh, ten minutes?" he asked.

"Sounds like a plan. See you there." said Will, grinning. He walked over to his mom's room and cracked the door open. She rolled over in bed and saw him at the door, smiling softly, "Hey mom, I have to run out for a minute. I'm meeting Daniel at the flower field again but I'm bringing Daisy." he barely gave his mom time to respond before grabbing his beloved dog and running out the door, not even saying anything to his friends.

When he arrived at the field, Daniel was waiting for him.

"Hi, cutie." said Daniel, as soon as Will made it to him. The other boy blushed slightly and sat himself down next to Daniel, letting Daisy trot around them.

"Hi," said Will, leaning across and kissing Daniel straight on the lips. "I've wanted to do that all last night." he whispered as they parted.

"Me too." said Daniel, pulling him in for another kiss. "As much as I'm enjoying this, it isn't why I asked you to come," Daniel let his hands fall from Will's shoulders to grasp his hands instead, "Every day, when the wind sweeps through the grass, I hear it whispering your name. And the bugs, they sing for you and call you to me. I see you everywhere, in everything, and I love it. I want to be able to proudly call you mine. Even though we're young and it's silly, I would do anything for you to call me your boyfriend. What do you say?"

Will sat there, agape, hardly able to comprehend that someone cared for him this much. "I'd love that." he said eventually, keeping their hands clasped as he went in to kiss him again, to show just how

much he meant it.

november third, 1984

"Remember, when we're gone, there's no going out *unless* Jonathan is there, okay?" said Joyce for the third time that evening. Hopper had finally convinced her to go on a date and she was quite nervous to leave Will on his own. Although, he was hardly alone. He'd invited over Lucas, Mike, Dustin, Daniel, and Max (he hadn't really wanted to invite Max but Lucas practically forced him to).

"Don't worry mom, we'll be fine." said Will, "we haven't got anywhere to go anyway."

"Don't worry about it," said Hopper, gently placing a hand on his girlfriends shoulder, "I think between all eight of them they could put up a pretty good fight." This did not help calm her down.

"A fight?" she said, nervously.

"Come on, they'll be safe." said Jim, leading her out the door. Joyce turned around at the door and gave a final wave before closing the door behind her. She still felt nervous when she was away from Will but was determined to have a nice night.

"So, now what?" asked Dustin, leaning back against Will's bed. It was a few minutes after Hopper and Joyce had left and all seven kids were lounging in Will's room.

"Well, originally I wanted to go on a bike ride with all of you. I'm not sure if we can convince Jonathan though." said Will, laying on his bed with his head on Daniel's lap.

"The Chief had a point though, between us we can put up a good fight." said Max.

"Yeah but against the demogorgon?" said Mike. El shuddered,

"The demogorgon's gone." said said determidly, as if by saying it it proved her right.

"The demogorgon?" said Max and Daniel in synchronization.

"C'mon, let's go ask him." said Will, hopping up and leading his friends from his room, hoping Max and Daniel would forget about Mike's slip up.

"Guys, mom would literally skin me alive." said Jonathan, who was lounging on his bed, book in hand.

"Yeah, but there's seven of us. And one of us can control things with her mind. I think we'll be fine." said Will. Daniel and Max decided to let that comment slide, assuming it was a joke.

"I don't know…"

"Please? You let me go alone on halloween. We'll be home before mom finds out and I promise I won't snitch on you." said Will.

"Fine. but I'm coming with you. I'll leave a note in case mom comes home early." said Jonathan, giving in.

"Where are we going?" asked Max, as they continued to pedal down a long dirt road. She was perched on the back of Lucas' bike while El rode on the back of Mike's, her arms tightly wrapped around his waist and he head resting against his back.

"The lake." said Will.

"Oh, you mean the one you were almost found dead in and the one Mike almost died in?" said Lucas, eyebrows raised.

"Mhm." said Will, "It has a good path around it for racing."

"Yeah, it's all fun and games until someone falls in." said Mike, rolling his eyes.

"What *have* you done to him." said Dustin, jokingly, his comment aimed at Daniel.

"I have no idea." replied Daniel.

"Oh, please, I've just been seeing things in a new way recently! Letting things go, living life in the moment, it's a good mindset. I've even learned a few tricks on my bike I'll show you all later." said Will,

laughing slightly.

They made it to the lake not long after, the cold wind having made their noses red and their cheeks a bright pink. They raced around the lake for a little under an hour, Will winning most of them. They even taught El how to bike (at a safe distance from the cliff), While El was off biking with Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Will hung around by the cliff, chatting and laughing amongst themselves while Max listened to their conversation and Daniel was a little ways away inspecting some flowers that had made it through the recent snow.

"Hey guys, want to see a cool thing I've been working on? It's a trick I learned to do on my bike." said Will, standing up and brushing off his pants. He walked over to his bike and climbed on, turning it towards the cliff and waving his friends away so he didn't run into any of them.

"Are you sure that's safe?" asked Lucas, concerned that Will was just going to launch himself of the cliff.

"Yeah, it's just a little hop," said Will, confident that he could pull off his little stunt. However after he made the jump on his bike, the small vehicle landed on the wrong side of a pebble that, like Lucas suspected, sent Will off the cliff, falling to his death.

song - when the water meets the mountains by lewis watson

9. let it go

hi! so a few little notes before we get started (I love writing these). so, I just moved which is why there's been such a hiatus! another note is that there's a part of this chapter where I put in detail the physical effects on the body of someone who's jumped off a cliff so I'll put a little trigger warning right before it. It's pretty short but it's also quite gross. Another thing is that I totally bs'd the thing about the 'virus' so don't me because I know it really isn't that realistic haha. also yep, the Tom in this chapter is the same Tom from Hopper's office complaining about the holes in his yard! it's been awhile so I figured I'd jog your memory on that so it isn't too confusing.

Don't forget to leave comments! they make my day :)

chapter nine

let it go

"I wonder what they're doing." said Joyce, fiddling with the material of the tablecloth. They were out for dinner and try as she might, her mind kept wandering back to Will, at home.

"Don't worry about him," said Jim, reaching out and taking her hand. "He's with his friends and Jonathan's there too. Besides, I think El would be pretty good protection if anything were to happen."

"I suppose you're right." she said with a laugh, giving his hand a small squeeze.

"Hey, Chief." said a voice, interrupting them. The two looked up to see the owner of the restaurant looking down at them, concerned. "I've got a boy on the phone…" Joyce's grip tightened, "He's asked for you to meet him at the hospital. He also wants his mother to come and he said to tell you two that 'Will's injured, but still breathing.'"

"Thanks.." said Hopper, standing quickly and letting go of Joyce's hand. The two of them rushed to the car and were off, Jim barely keeping to the speed limit. Though they were quiet during the ride, Joyce's mind was racing. What could have possibly happened? She

figured they would have had to go somewhere for something so bad to happen. Injured, but still breathing. She began to hyperventilate and barely noticed when Jim placed his hand in hers as a comforting gesture. The lake. The cliff. The realization hit her like a brick and memories began flooding back. His body. The funeral. What if he died? For real this time? She decided to close her eyes for the rest of the ride, trying to calm herself down.

When they made it to the hospital they were directed to Will's room. Inside, a doctor lurked in a corner of the room and Will's friends surrounded him, while Jonathan sat in a chair not to far from the bed. El sat closest, her hand clasped in his, a worried expression on her face. Daniel sat next to her, one of his hands brushed up next to his. His face was pale and his eyes were wide and he knew that however much he wanted to hold his boyfriends hand, it probably wasn't the best option. Max, Lucas, Dustin, and Mike all huddled on his other side, gazing intently at Will's pale, peaceful face. The boy in question was still alive. He, against all odds, survived his fall with only a few broken bones which the doctors were not satisfied with. As soon as Joyce burst through the door, the doctor immediately jumped into action.

"You're the mother, right?" he asked her.

"Yes, I want to see my-" she began, trying to peek around the man who had walked in front of her.

"You know what happened, right? How your son fell of that cliff?" he said, cutting her off as he gingerly held his clipboard in his hands. Joyce closed her eyes for a moment and took a deep breath before nodding, as if she'd known all along. Which, she supposed, she did. "Well, technically, there's no way he should have survived. From what we know about the effects of making fatal jumps off of cliffs and bridges, there's a number of things you can die from. For one, the impact alone can kill you. If you hit the water at a certain angle, you can sink so far down that you drown, get caught in currents, and more. Plus, if you fall from a high enough place, all your bones will shatter. Your ribs can break, ripping inwards and-"

"Please. Stop." said Joyce, holding up a hand to stop the doctor, "I think I get it."

"Well, anyway, after finding that your son survived, we did some scans only to find that he had no broken bones, no ruptured organs, and next to no damage taken. However, on closer inspection, we found that his left arm appeared to have broken and then healed wrong. We took care of it but it was a curious find. Were you aware of that injury before?" he read from the chart in front of him.

"No, he didn't have a broken arm before this." she responded, thoroughly confused.

"Oh, well, uh, I hate to do this but I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you and your son to leave. We've done all we can." said the doctor hurriedly. Hopper could tell he didn't want to be part of Will's 'miraculous' survival.

Will got his sense of touch back first. He felt the rumbling under him that lead him to believe he was laying down in a car and when he opened his eyes to see only the soft glow of streetlights breaking through the inky blackness he knew that the hand clutching his was Daniels. Hidden under the veil of night the boys could hold hands without anyone knowing. As his gaze adjusted, he saw the outline of Daniel's curly hair and whenever they passed a streetlight, his freckled face was illuminated. It took a few moments, but he soon realized he was laying across quite a few people. His head was on Daniel's lap, El was next to him, then Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Jonathan, and Max on the end. After some inspection of the cars interior, he found that he was in his mom's car.

"Hey." Will whispered. Daniel jumped slightly and looked down, a grin on his face.

"You're awake!" he said, trying to be quiet as to not startle Will.

"Will's awake?!" said Lucas, leaning over to get a better view. Joyce immediately turned around in her spot in the passenger's seat,

"Will! Are you okay?" she asked him, reaching back to place a hand on his arm.

"Mhm, where are we going?" he asked. The last thing he remembered was falling off the cliff.

"The lab. The hospital fixed your broken arm but they claim that there's nothing left for them to do. I'm getting to the bottom of this though, whatever it takes." said Joyce, giving his arm a soft pat before turning back around in her seat.

"Oh okay, but don't you guys want to go home?" Will asked, ignoring his aching bones as he positioned himself so that this head and shoulders were leaning up against the car door and weren't entirely dependent on Daniel's arm holding him up.

"We're staying." said El, "I wasn't there to save you when it happened so I need to make sure you're okay."

"And besides, It would be a bit of an inconvenience to drive us home anyway considering we all live in the opposite direction." joked Lucas, giving Will a pat on the leg. Will grinned, trying to not show how much that pat on the leg actually hurt his aching body.

When they got to the lab, Hopper helped Joyce and Jonathan get Will into the lab before going out to the car to deal with the other kids.

"Now, I know you want to be there for Will but-" began Hopper,

"I'm not letting Max in there." said Mike, crossing his arms.

"What? And you're going to let Daniel in?" said Max, leaning over to glare at Mike.

"Yeah, well, it's different. You don't know what's going on here and it's not like you have a bond with Will or anything. I don't even know why you're here to be perfectly honest." said Mike.

"Well, I was hoping I'd get to explain everything to you two. We're a little limited on time but I should be able to get a shortened version out." said Hopper, turned around in the front seat of the car.

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" said Lucas.

'We don't really have a choice at this point." said Mike.

"And what about El? Won't they try to take her?" asked Dustin.

"As for El, after I have a word with Doctor Owens, she'll be ours. Now, Max and Daniel. If you ever repeat any of this to anyone you could get yourselves or any of us killed, understand?" said Hopper, fixing them with a harsh stare.

"Okay." they said, in sync, very confused. And so it began, Hopper retold almost everything that had happened over the past year, with help from Mike, Dustin, and Lucas when he got some of the finer details wrong.

"So, what'd you think about that?" asked Max. The group of seven was walking through the halls of the lab, trying to find Will's room. Max had pulled Daniel a few steps back, wanting to know his thoughts on the situation.

"I'm not sure. I mean, after what happened tonight I wouldn't be surprised if he was telling the truth." said Daniel.

"I think it's total bullshit." replied Max, her arms crossed over her stripy shirt.

"Oh? Why?" asked Daniel.

"Seriously? You want me to believe that El literally came from this lab and that there's another dimension that Will got stuck in for a week?" she scoffed.

"Yeah but Will surviving that fall? He should be dead right now. Falling from the height that he did; all his bones should have shattered."

"I don't know… I'm just not sure how they all relate back to each other." said Max, shrugging.

The group made it to the room a few minutes later, only about twenty minutes after Will, Joyce, and Jonathan. They had been waiting for the doctor for about ten minutes, but didn't have to wait long after everyone else arrived.

"Oh wow, we've got quite the gathering." said Doctor Owens, walking in to find Joyce, Hopper, and Jonathan on one side of Will's bed with everyone else huddled on the other side. The Doctor decided to take

his place on the end of the bed. "So we've run some tests and came to the conclusion that you're suffering from a virus. I know it sounds silly, but let me explain. Basically, when you were in the upside down, you were exposed to the air for almost a whole week. This means you breathed in quite a few things you weren't supposed to. We compared a sample of the air particles with a sample of your saliva and found a few matches. Amongst the random stuff floating around in there, there's also a few virus type things. They enter your body and begin infecting your cells. Which means, when you hit the water, your bones did break and you obviously took lots of physical damage but the virus caused you to heal incredibly quickly. So quickly, in fact, you were probably healed by the time you floated up after you fell in." there was a brief silence before Will said,

"But what about my arm?"

"You probably landed weirdly so your arm didn't have enough time to move before it healed the wrong way. I'd say that you're free to go back to school whenever you want but if I were you I'd wait a few days." said Doctor Owens.

"You said it's a virus… but will he heal from it?" asked Joyce.

"Well, uh, we aren't sure yet." replied the Doctor, "we've never really seen anything like this before." That's when he saw her. Tucked away, halfway behind Mike, stood Eleven. "Is that…" he began, staring at her intently. Everyone followed his gaze to find El. nervously scooting further behind Mike.

"Why don't we have a chat in the hall." said Hopper, after noticing who Doctor Owens was looking at.

"Wait, but, how long has she been with you?" asked the Doctor, after Hopper explained everything.

"She's been with Joyce for about two weeks." said Jim.

"Okay, but what do you want from me?" he asked.

"Adoption papers. And a promise that you'll let her just live her life, free from her past life." said Hopper. The Doctor considered this for a

moment,

"Fine. when would you like the papers?" he asked. "Listen, Chief, I don't want that girl. She's been through so much already and I've no need of her. Plus, I'm trying to give this place a good rep and taking her back is not going to help that."

"Oh, okay. Uh, I can swing by sometime next week, I guess." said Hopper, relieved that it had gone on without a hitch. He had, however, been mentally preparing himself for this face-off since he'd gotten the call that El was back and honestly, it was a bit underwhelming.

"Perfect. I'll have a birth certificate by Monday. I could give you adoption papers if you prefer but with a birth certificate there'll be no doubt." said Doctor Owens, "now, get back in there with Will. He'll need lots of help adjusting and coming to terms with what he just found out." the Doctor gave Hopper's arm one last pat before sauntering down the hall, leaving the man behind him confused but still relieved that he'd managed to get through that without any major issues.

They didn't linger in the lab for too much longer after that. Everyone could tell it was making El anxious and they really had no reason to stay. And so they left, dropping everyone off around midnight with hurried explanations and apologies to the parents. However, no one could fall asleep for hours. Their thoughts moving far to fast to even consider getting any sleep. Will even got El in bed with him, hoping her warmth and presence would calm him down and help him sleep. It did, and Joyce found them eight hours later cuddled together, hand in hand.

november fifth, 1984

On a crisp Saturday morning, Hopper was out doing a few things he'd meant to do in the past week but got distracted. That lead him to the Everett household where he knocked on the forest green door before him and waited patiently for in the cold. Daniel opened it after a few moments and after only a brief hello asked,

"How's Will?"

"Will is feeling better. He should be back to school on Monday. Is your dad here?" asked Hopper.

"Yeah, he's-" but Daniel never got to finish his sentence because just then, his dad walked in.

"Jim! Good to see you. It's been a few weeks since I went to your office; something come up?" asked Tom.

"Oh yeah, you won't believe what's been going on in my life. So, the holes still in your yard?" asked Hopper.

"Well, about that…" began Tom, "They're gone." Jim raised his eyebrows.

"Where did they go?" he asked, going to stand by the back window and look out on the grass.

"I have no idea. One day, I woke up and they were filled!" said Tom, following Hopper outside as he went to inspect where the holes once were. You could tell they were there due to the grass only just beginning to grow.

"I'm not sure what to say…" said Hopper, running a hand over his head, "I mean, I guess you don't need to worry about it anymore seeing as the holes are filled. But if you see anything don't hesitate to call me." he said. Tom nodded,

"Will do. Are you going so soon?" he asked. Jim nodded,

"I've got a few other places to hit before I go home. Like I said before, you wouldn't believe what's been going on in my life."

november seventh, 1984

"Dustin, Dustin!" called Lucas, chasing after the curly haired boy.

"Lucas?" asked Dustin, finally hearing him and turning around.

"Yeah." said Lucas, finally catching up to him, "I need you to get Will and Mike and meet me in the A/V room during lunch. I'm calling an emergency meeting."

"K, I'm on it. See you then." replied Dustin. They then went in their separate ways, looking for the other two members of their party.

"How do you feel?" asked Daniel, pulling Will into a less populated area of the hallway.

"Okay. Just a little rattled still. It's just… hard to really get, y'know? I guess it just hasn't registered." said Will, shrugging and leaning slightly on the locker that was behind him.

"Yeah, I get that. That's how I felt after my mom died. Plus, you found out your… ability... in one of the worst ways, by testing it." said Daniel, smiling at him gently.

"I just need something normal and consistent and someone who doesn't act like I could fall apart at any second." said Will, sighing.

"Well you have me." said Daniel, smiling. Will smiled back,

"True." he said. Daniel looked around to see how many people could see them before leaning in and kissing Will. It was sweet but fast and where they were standing meant that almost no one could see them.

"Hey, lovebirds!" called Dustin, finally spotting Will. "I'm going to need to take Will away for a bit, emergency meeting!" he said, grabbing Will's good arm and pulling him away.

"Where are we going?" asked Will, shaking off Dustin's grasp and walking beside him.

"A/V room. It's an emergency meeting." said Dustin.

"What are we doing here?" asked Mike, after joining Will, Dustin, and Lucas in the A/V room.

"I need your help." said Lucas. "I need to figure out a way to get Max to go to the snowball with me."

"Max?" said Mike, "You don't even know her that well."

"Yeah, I mean, you guys have hung out like twice." said Dustin.

"But we had fun!" argued Lucas.

"Except for that time Will fell off a cliff." said Mike.

"True. But she's in on El now so that automatically makes us friends of sorts." said Lucas.

"It does?" said Will, cocking his head to one side.

"Guys, please, will you just help me?" said Lucas, crossing his arms and leaning into the wall behind him.

"Fine." said Dustin. "Have you tried asking her?"

"Pfft, no." Lucas thought for a minute, "oh god, I don't even know her." he said, falling into the chair in the middle of the room. The three other boys exchanged a look,

"We can help you." offered Will, "how about instead of plotting here all of lunch, we go out and eat lunch with Max. I'm not sure she has anyone to sit with anyway." Lucas nodded,

"Good idea. Thanks, Will."

"Well, come on, we've only got thirty minutes left of lunch." said Mike, hopping down from his seat on the windowsill to usher everyone out, before Lucas could chicken out.

"Woah, what are you guys doing?" asked Max, as the boys settled into the empty seats around her.

"We thought you might want some people to sit with." said Lucas, who was sitting across from her. "The people in this school can be mean.'

"Uh, not really…." she said, looking around at everyone happily hanging out with friends.

"Really mean." said Dustin, shaking his head.

"Plus, we've all decided that you're fun to hang out with and that we'd like to be your friends." said Will. "and I think El would be

pretty sad if you never came over again." he said with a soft laugh. Max considered his proposal. There really wasn't a downside to it, she decided. Besides, she did need friends and often envied how well the boys got along together, laughing and conversing as they walked down the hallways or passing notes to each other in class.

"Fine." she said eventually, "but just so you know, I'm mostly doing this for El." She knew it was a lie, that she did actually want to befriend the boys. Will, Dustin, Mike, and Lucas seemed to catch on that she was lying to but after a short silence the five of them burst into conversation. The boys eager to learn about Max's life and vice versa.

song: let it go by James bay

10. upside down

chapter ten

upside down

november tenth, 1984

"That was probably the worst move you could've made." said Mike, tilting his head as he watched his friends bicker over what to do next. They were playing D&D in Mike's basement and the game was getting more and more intense as they got closer to the end of the campaign. El sat next to Mike, leaning into him as she watched everything unfold. She was enthralled and was paying close attention to all the moves made because Will told her that she could play in the next campaign if she wanted. Suddenly, Dustin caught a look at the time,

"Oh my god guys, it's ten pm! My mom's going to be so pissed; it's a school night!" as they all jumped up to scurry out of the room, Mike called El back.

"Hey, uh, I-I was wondering if maybe you wanted to go on that date we talked about." he said, stuttering a bit out of nerves. El blushed,

"Yes. Tomorrow after school?" she asked.

"Yeah sure. You'll be at my house, right? We can go when I get home." he said, smiling down at her.

"Okay." she said, returning his smile.

"So, you'll call me about it, yeah?" said Nancy, having just finished a lengthy conversation with Jonathan. He had only come by to pick up Will and El but Nancy had distracted him and had made him completely forget why he'd come by. Two hours seemed to have passed in mere seconds.

"Oh yeah, of course." he said. Just then, Will and his friends burst into the living room.

"Jonathan, it's ten pm!" said Will. Jonathan hopped up,

"Oh, sorry Nancy, I've got to get these guys home. There'll be a search party any minute." he said with a laugh. Nancy smiled and they quickly finished their goodbyes. Jonathan ushered the kids out of the door and ended up driving everyone home, putting Lucas and Dustin's bikes in the back. While they were on their way to Dustin's house, the first stop, El decided to break the silence,

"Mike asked me to go on a date." she said. The three boys, sitting in a row in the backseat, shared a surprised look.

"Really?" said Lucas. El nodded.

"When?" asked Dustin.

"Tomorrow. He said we'd go after school." said El.

"That's exciting!" said Will, smiling at her. When they got home (thankfully their mother was not there), El followed Will into his room.

"Will, what do you do on a date." she asked.

"Well, uh, I've never actually been on a date before so I can't say for sure but usually you just go out and do something with the other person." said Will, slightly cringing at his terrible explantation. He decided to try and bring it back, "Lots of people go out to dinner or to a movie or anywhere really. Daniel's taken me to the flower field a few times and while it wasn't technically a date it probably could be considered one. I don't know where Mike is taking you so I'd wear something nice just in case." El was quiet, considering this information.

"Do you know Max's phone number?" she asked eventually.

"Um, no." he said, confused, "we can look her up in the phone book though. I don't think her name will be on there since she only just moved in but I do know her address." El nodded and they went to go find the book. After ten minutes of looking, they finally found it and El quickly went to go call her. It took a few moments but eventually she picked up.

"Who is this?" asked Max.

"El." she responded.

"Oh, hey El! It's a little late for a call, isn't it?" she asked.

"I need your help. Mike is taking me on a date and I don't know what to wear." said El.

"You need *my* help with picking out *clothes* for a *date*." said Max, perplexed. El clearly didn't catch on the sarcasm,

"Yes, that's why I called you." Max considered for a moment. She figured she might as well help, what's the worst that could happen?

"Okay, walk me through some of your clothes." said Max, settling into a chair that she had dragged over by the phone this morning. El, on the other side of the line, had one hand on the phone and had the cord stretched all the way as she attempted to grab the closest box of clothes. Eventually she succeeded and pulled the box closer to her so she could start going through it with Max.

In the other room, Will was laying on his bed, talking with his friends over his supercom. The connection was bad but he could mostly make out everything.

"So, where are you taking her? Over." asked Lucas.

"I don't know. Over." sighed Mike, throwing his arms in the air even though no one could see him.

"Maybe the movies? Or you could take her to dinner or something. Over." suggested Dustin.

"I don't know about the movies. I mean, I'd kind of like to talk to her. Over." said Mike.

"What about going out for ice cream? Then you can talk to her and it's not as formal as dinner. Over." added Will. Mike was suddenly hit with an idea.

"I've got it guys! Thanks for the help. Over." said Mike. There was silence for a few moments before Lucas said,

"Hello? Over."

"I guess he's gone. 'Night guys." said Dustin. They exchanged goodnight's before putting away their supercom's, hoping to get an actual good night of sleep. Will didn't wait long before El was back in his room and cuddling under the blankets in her fort.

"Why did you need to talk to Max?" asked Will, turning to face her in the dark room.

"Fashion advice." said El. Will raised his eyebrows,

"Oh. How was that?" he asked.

"Good. We picked out a good outfit." she said.

"That's good. Ready for bed?" he asked, yawning. El nodded, reaching out to pet Daisy, who was all curled up at the edge of El's fort, her eyes closed.

"Goodnight." whispered El.

"Goodnight."

november eleventh, 1984

"Holly, will you pass me the butter?" asked El, holding out one hand as she looked closely at the instructions on the side of the brownie box. She was baking with Holly, one of her favorite things to do with the small girl. Holly glanced around at the mess on the countertop. She really wasn't sure which was the butter but decided to just grab something at random. It was the milk. "Oh, uh," El glanced at the milk container in her hand before placing it down and picking up the butter instead. Holly seemed unfazed and began trying to see into the bowl in front of El, standing on her toes on the stool and leant on the countertop. El glanced at the clock; she had about thirty minutes until Mike got home, 4:30 he said, when the short hand was between four and five and the long hand was on the six.

"Done?" asked a quiet voice. El looked away from the clock to see Holly, two hands grasping the bowl, as if she were planning to pour it into the pan herself.

"Almost. We just need to mix it a little more. Do you want to do that?" said El, handing Holly the spoon she'd been using to mix. Holly mixed for a few minutes, an intense look of concentration on her face. Once El deemed the batter was ready, the two of them worked together to get it into the pan. After the brownies were in the oven, they spent a good few minutes eating any leftover batter before cleaning up. Then, El sat Holly down on her stool in front of the oven, "Okay, I have to go change but will you carefully watch the oven while I'm gone? Don't touch anything though, it's hot." she said. Holly nodded in response and El scurried out of the room, going to the living room where she had left a small bag, containing her clothes for the date. She and Max had decided to go pretty simple, sticking to jeans and a flannel. After some discussion and a little listening in on WIll's conversation they deduced that wherever El was going to probably wasn't going to be very fancy so they went for the comfort and warmth route instead, it was becoming a very cold winter after all.

"So, where are we going?" asked El, arms wrapped around Mike's waist as he peddled down the road.

"I thought we could go get ice cream and then walk down to the train tracks. There's one train that comes by at 5:30 and after that we can walk on the tracks. I also brought some coins that we can lay on the tracks before the train comes by and then the train squishes them. It's something my friends and I used to do all the time when we were younger." said Mike. El smiled,

"That sounds fun. I've never had ice cream." she said, resting her head on Mike's shoulder. Everytime she did that it made his heart jump into his throat but he quickly calmed himself down, certain that El would be able to feel the beating of his heart.

They arrived at the ice cream parlor a few minutes later and after a long discussion over the flavor choices, El and Mike sat down in a booth, El with her strawberry ice cream and Mike with his chocolate. They looked at each other in awkward silence for a few moments. Mike couldn't help but notice how red El's cheeks and nose were from the cold and how the wind had made her hair even curlier and slightly more frizzy. Suddenly, El reached out a hand and pressed it to the side of his face.

"Your cheeks are red." she said. Mike laughed and placed a hand on one of her cheeks,

"So are yours." he said. They pulled their hands back and descended into giggles. With the awkwardness gone, they began talking in ernest.

"So," said Mike, after El told him of her entire experience in the upside down, from when she was in that classroom to them finding her less than a month ago. "You really were out there the whole time." El shrugged, the cold wind biting at her cheeks as they walked down the street towards the railroad, hand in hand.

"Not really. I was in the upside down for a few days, just trying to find my way back to the lab. When I got to the lab, there wasn't anyone there. But I stayed close by, watching, but the only one who came was that… that doctor that Will sees. He came a few days after I arrived. That's when I started getting Hopper's food. I saw him a few times too. But I never said anything, I was afraid he was trying to get me out, just to give me to the bad men." she said.

"Hopper wouldn't give you to the bad men." said Mike, "he's like… your dad."

"My dad? He doesn't even live with me." said El, confused at where Mike was going with the conversation.

"I mean, at this point he kind of does." said MIke with a laugh, "Basically, he's there to protect you, like a dad would. Plus, I bet if you'd come out when he was there giving you food he'd have made you go and live with him."

"Really?"

"Yeah probably. Although I bet you'd just end up living at Will's house in the end anyway." said Mike. El was confused. She knew Hopper and Joyce were dating but she wasn't sure what Mike was hinting at.

"Is this it?" asked El, gesturing to the train tracks a few feet in front of them as she tried to change the conversation topic.

"Yes! Here's a penny," he said, handing her the small copper coin. "Now, you just place it on the track and wait for the train to come." El did as he said, placing the penny on the train track before stepping back and taking Mike's hand again. She knew trains were loud but wasn't expecting it to be as loud as it was. She put it down to never having been that close to a train before but it still startled her. After it passed, they went to collect the coins. To El's slight surprise, the penny was now completely flat and smooth. She grinned and stuck it in her pocket. "Pretty cool, isn't it?" El nodded,

"Yes. Are there any more trains?" Mike shook his head.

"No, there's only the one train on Friday." He lead her on to the tracks and they began walking down them, in the direction of home. "It's a pretty nice view from here, all these trees." he said, trying to make small talk. El made a noise of agreement.

"Mike, why did you ask me out on a date?" she asked. Mike was taken aback and took a few moments before responding,

"Well, because whenever I'm with you, I just, feel complete, y'know? And I just, whenever you're around, I-" Mike couldn't quite find the words to say what he wanted so he decided to show El instead. He stopped and took her face in his hands before pressing a kiss to her lips. El smiled when they parted and drew Mike in for a hug. The kiss had been less awkward than the first, which both of them appreciated.

"I feel the same." said El into his shoulder.

song: upside down by jack johnson

11. the village

chapter eleven

the village

november thirteenth, 1984

"Dusty?" asked Mrs. Henderson, knocking on Dustin's bedroom door.

"Yeah?" he asked sleepily, rolling over on his bed and sitting up.

"We're out of eggs so I have to go run down to the store to grab some. Feel free to make yourself breakfast though, just can't use eggs." said his mom, peeking around the door. Dustin grinned and gave her a thumbs up. His mom blew him a kiss before walking out and closing the door behind her. Dustin collapsed back into bed and looked over at his clock, which informed him that it was eight in the morning. He groaned and rolled over again, before a rumbling in his stomach forced him to get up and head to the kitchen. However, he never made it to the kitchen because halfway there he glanced out of the window and what he saw made him forget all about breakfast.

"Lucas, Lucas, Lucas, Lucas." said a voice coming from Lucas' bedside table. The boy in question tried ignoring the sound by burying his head under his pillow but was unsuccessful,

"What?!" he said finally, grabbing the Supercom.

"Oh thank god! You're the only one who will pick up." said Dustin.

"Yeah, well, no shit sherlock, it's eight in the morning!"

"YeAh, weLl," said Dustin, mocking Lucas, "It's actually kind of important."

"Fine. What happened?"

"So, I was going to make breakfast, when I look out of my window and see my yard is filled with holes-"

"Holes?"

"Shut up and let me finish. Yes, holes. So obviously, I go out and investigate. But, when I stuck my hand in the hole-" Lucas really had to try to not respond to that, "-the dirt was *slimy*."

"So it was wet?" asked Lucas.

"No, *slimy*."

"Okay, I get it, it was slimy. Should I come over?"

"Yes." said Dustin, now back in his bedroom.

"K, I'll be there in a few minutes. Over." said Lucas, putting down the supercom and jumping out of bed, going to put clothes on and tell his parents where he was going. By the time he made it to his friends house, Dustin was pacing the floor of his kitchen, chewing anxiously on a piece of toast.

"Oh! You're here." he said, dropping his toast on to a plate and going to meet Lucas at the door.

"Dude, why are you so worked up about this? It was probably a dog or something." said Lucas, following Dustin as he went to open his back door.

"You didn't touch this dirt though. It was wet in a way that dirt shouldn't be. It felt slimy and *alive*." said Dustin, pausing at the door.

"So you're saying…"

"It's from the Upside Down."

As soon as Jonathan's car was out of view, Will walked up to Daniel's front door and knocked. He heard a scuffling behind the door before it swung open, the smiling face of his boyfriend behind it.

"Hi!" said Daniel. "I wasn't expecting you."

"As if I wouldn't come by and see you on your birthday." scoffed Will. "happy birthday, by the way." he said with a soft laugh. Daniel

grinned,

"Thanks. Want to come in?"

"Well, actually, I came to give you your gift. But, I can't give it to you now. You have to come with me first." said Will.

"Oo, sounds mysterious. Where are we going?" asked Daniel.

"That's a surprise."

"I'll go ask my dad. Wait right there."

Ten minutes later, the two of them were sat face to face, in their flower field.

"So, what's the gift?" asked Daniel, playfully.

"A portrait done by me!" said Will, taking out a sketchpad and various pencils from the bag he had brought along.

"Oh, you're kidding. Surly I don't deserve such a gift."

"Pfft, I'd beg to differ." said Will, admiring Daniel's face as he began to sketch out a rough shape.

"Hmm, fine. I'll take it. But only under one condition."

"Oh? What's your condition?" asked Will, a smile on his face.

"That you sign it. So I always know who made it."

"Yeah, I think I can do that." said Will, his smile widening.

november fourteenth, 1984

Will was practically dozing off at this point. It was english class. *Monday*. And he was ready to go home. He perked up immediately when he felt a piece of paper nudging at his elbow.

Btw, I really love my birthday present. - Daniel

Will smiled. Daniel had told him just about a million times how much

he loved his present. He went to respond when an argument caught his attention. Their teacher was currently scolding a group of populars in the front row for laughing during her lesson.

"It was nothing, Mrs. Gilbert!" one girl giggled.

"Who was it *for*?" Mrs. Gilbert asked, holding up a white piece of paper. On the paper, was a neatly written letter but one word stood out. It was 'gay' underlined at least three times. Will felt all the blood drain from his face and turned to Daniel, his face also white as a sheet. One of the other girls, still giggling, turned around and pointed at the two boys in question.

"I saw them *kiss* in a corner the other day." said the girl shaking her head, a few giggles still slipping past her lips. "It was so wrong, mrs. Gilbert. I had half a mind to go tell the principal right then in there."

"So instead of reporting it you just write gossip-y letters to your friends?" asked Mrs. Gilbert, crumpling the note in her hand, "All three of you go to the office now."

"Us too?" asked Daniel.

"Yes, obviously." she said, annoyed.

"For doing what? *Kissing* a *boy*?" asked Daniel, standing up and crossing his arms. "I bet if it had been a girl I was kissing I wouldn't be going to the office for it." he said angrily, storming out of the room. Will and the giggling girl left after him, a lot more quietly then Daniel.

"Your parents will be here soon. But considering that this is the second time this month you've had to come to my office I'd expect to be suspended for at least a week." said Ms. Anderson, leaning back into her chair.

"And me?" piped up the girl.

"You're free to go with a warning, Ms. Green. Just don't pass notes in class and try to pay attention." she said passively, waving a hand. The girl left and the door snapped shut behind her, leaving a deafening silence in its wake.

It didn't last long, for both Joyce and Tom arrived only a few minutes after the girl, both confused.

"So, I'm sure you both know why you've been called?" said Ms. Anderson, a lot more bitterly than she had when talking to the young girl.

"Not really, no." said Tom, a little angrily.

"Well, supposedly, your sons were seen kissing a few days ago in the hall." she said, her hands clasped tightly together in her lap.

"Is it true?" asked Joyce. Will, on the verge of tears, nodded.

"Yeah. And what's so wrong about it? Just because I'm minding my own business, loving who I want, I upset you-" he gestured to Ms. Anderson, "Because we're gay? As if it affects your life at all." said Daniel, angrily.

"It's gross, that's why." said Tom, arms crossed.

"They're teenagers, can't you just let them live?" asked Joyce, also angry, but for different reasons than Tom.

"They're just setting themselves up for failure. I mean, no one's going to hire them, and marriage? As if gay marriage will ever be legal." said Ms. Anderson, scoffing.

"And who's to say it won't be legal?" asked Daniel sitting on the edge of his seat. "And as for the jobs, there have been quite a few openly gay politicians. But maybe you're a little too close-minded to even acknowledge their existence."

"How dare-" began their principal, appalled at Daniels reply.

"I'm not gay." said Will, interrupting her. It was the first thing he'd said and everyone turned to look at him. Daniel raised an eyebrow and went to respond but Ms. Anderson spoke before he could,

"It doesn't matter. The point is, you kissed on school grounds and I'm suspending you for the rest of the week. Please just go home now, I can't bear to continue this conversation." she said, waving them all

out of the room.

"You said you weren't gay in the office," said Joyce, once she and Will were in the car on the way home, "What did you mean?"

"I'm not. I like boys and girls." he said, his voice wavering a little.

"So you're bisexual?" she asked gently. Will shrugged,

"I guess. But I've decided not to label myself. People value labels so much more over personalities so I've decided to let it go. I'm neither gay, nor straight, or bi. I'll fall in love with whoever, boy or girl, and that'll be that, no biggie." he said, fiddling with the zipper on his backpack. He felt slightly robbed. *He* was the one who was supposed to decide when he wanted to come out to his mom, not Ms. Anderson or stupid Jessica Green.

"But why didn't you tell me you were dating Daniel?" asked his mom, after mulling over what he had just said.

"I'm not sure. I guess I was afraid that-that you wouldn't- love me as much or something. I don't know, it was stupid." he said quickly, tears coming to his eyes again.

"I could never love you any less, no matter who you loved." said Joyce, glancing over at him. Will, now so choked up he couldn't respond, simply nodded and smiled. He looked out the window and tried to take some deep breaths to calm down and let his mind wander to how Daniel was faring.

"I hope you know you're grounded." said Tom, his hands holding tightly on the steering wheel.

"Yeah." said Daniel, his body tense as he awaited what his dad would say next.

"And I'm not letting you out with Will alone for a long time. So don't even think that you'll be going out with him alone for at least the next month."

"Mhm." said Daniel, in the same tone of voice as before.

"I know you don't choose to be the way you are but it's still despicable and not the life I'd like for you. I'll be taking you to the church to see what they can sort out, I'm sure they'll be able to fix it." said his dad, still not daring to look at his son.

"Things are changing for gay people, dad. Soon we'll have marriage equality and everything, I'm sure of it." said Daniel, daring to speak up for the first time on the car ride. He daren't bring up the fact that no amount of praying or anything else could get rid of his sexuality.

"Well, I certainly hope not. I don't want you to have a bad life, son, but I just can't get behind marriage equality." he said, shaking his head.

"Joyce? Is that you?" asked Hopper, picking up the phone.

"Oh, finally. I was worried that if Flo picked up again she'd just hang up on me." said Joyce. It was later that night and she had waited for as long as she could to call Hopper.

"Is something wrong?"

"Uh, not really, but I was just wondering if you could come over? Something happened and I really need to talk about it with someone." she said, her arms crossed as she paced in front of the telephone, listening for both Hopper's response and trying to listen out for Will, wanting to make sure he wasn't crying in his room or anything.

"Yeah sure. This is perfect timing actually, I have something I wanted to show you." he said.

"Oh, great." said Joyce. Hopper could tell she was distracted so after they said their goodbyes he left the office, briefly telling Flo where he was going in case of an emergency. He swung by his house to grab El's birth certificate. He considered grabbing a pair of pyjamas but remembered that he already had a pair over there so he forgot about it, grabbing only the certificate and jumping back into his car.

When he arrived at the Byers' home, he found Joyce sitting inside on the couch, waiting for him.

"Oh! There you are." she said, as soon as he walked in. She then, a

little uncharacteristically, stood up and went to envelop him in a long hug.

"Oh, hello." he said, a little taken aback. "I know you have something you want to tell me and I want you to tell me about it but I wanted to show you this first." he said, pulling away and grabbing the certificate from his pocket. Joyce took it from him and read it over with wide eyes,

"When did you-"

"I arranged it when we were at the lab but only got around to picking it up yesterday." he said. That spiraled into another conversation which lasted hours.

It was only around ten pm, when they were both in bed, that Joyce finally got to bring about Will.

"Will is dating Daniel." she said, softly, breaking the silence and cutting into the inky darkness.

"Oh." said Hopper. "How do you feel about it?"

"I don't know." she sighed. "I mean, obviously I'm going to be supportive of him no matter what but it hurts to know that he's being treated the way he is. Especially on top of everything else."

"He'll get through it though. He's stronger than anyone might think."

"You're right." said Joyce, after a few moments. She sighed again, "I just wish I could protect him from everything."

A few more moments of silence.

"I wish you were here every night." said Joyce, leaning into Hopper.

"I could be. If you wanted." he said.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"I wonder what the kids would think of you moving in." she said.

"I don't think they'd mind it much. We can always ask in the morning."

"Mm. Well I vote that you do move in." she said.

"I guess it's settled then." said Hopper with a quiet laugh.

"I guess it is." she said, reaching up to kiss him gently on the lips. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight. I love you."

song: the village by wrabel

12. a house is not a home

chapter twelve

a house is not a home

november fifteenth, 1984

"Where the hell is he?" asked Dustin. He, Mike, and Lucas were stood outside of the school, waiting for Will.

"Maybe he's sick." said Lucas.

"Or maybe he's at the lab." suggested Mike.

"Are you looking for your loser gay friend?" asked Troy, strolling up to them.

"Go away." said Dustin.

"Well I thought I'd let you know that he's been suspended. Jessica Green saw him and Daniel kissing in the hallway the other day and Mrs. Gilbert found out. What, did he not tell you guys?" said Troy, smirking.

"Uh, no, he told us. We were just waiting for Max." said Dustin, playing it off like they'd known all along.

"Oh look, there she is." said Lucas, gesturing for his friends to follow him behind a wall where Troy couldn't hear them.

"*Suspended?*" said Mike.

"Why didn't he tell us?" said Dustin.

"How did Troy know before we did?" said Lucas.

"I guess we know where we're going after school." said Mike, grimly.

"Are the workers supposed to be here today to work on my room?" asked El. She was laying across the couch, Daisy cuddled up against

her and a book floating in front of her face, the pages turning by themselves.

"I think so. Mom said not to open the door for anyone though so if they do come they won't bother us." said Will, lounging on a nearby chair catching up on some homework by the light of a lamp. It was just the two of them home alone, doors locked, curtains drawn, and lights off. It was then that a knock ran out through the house. El's book dropped on her lap as she and Will turned to the noise and Daisy growled quietly. However, after peeking through the curtains, they saw that it was actually just their friends.

"I didn't think you'd open the door." said Mike, walking in and observing how dark it was in the house. Dustin and Lucas followed.

"It looks like no one's home." said Dustin, with a short laugh.

"Yeah, well, that's what we were going for." said Will, "My mom said we could stay here alone today but we had to keep the lights off, the doors locked, and the curtains drawn. She's also been calling consistently every half hour."

"Does she know?" asked Lucas. Will didn't have to confirm the meaning of his question.

"Yeah, my mom knows. The principal called her and Daniel's dad after Mrs. Gilbert sent us to her office." said Will. Leading everyone in and locking the door behind them. They all settled down in the living room as they listened to Will talk. "How did you guys find out? I thought I forgot to tell you."

"That's why we're here. Troy told us." said Mike.

"Why didn't you tell us?" said Dustin.

"I didn't have time to tell you in person and when I got home I just… took some time to process everything. El knows. My mom was supportive. And we told Jonathan at dinner. He seemed nice about it." said Will with a shrug.

"Have you talked to Daniel since?" asked Lucas.

"Well… no. I tried to call him last night but his dad picked up so I hung up before he knew who was calling him. His dad was a real asshole so I don't think it went down too well between them." he said with a sigh, leaning back into the couch cushions. "And the last thing I said was that I wasn't gay so I'm not really sure if he wants to talk to me anyways."

"But you aren't gay. I mean, you've had crushes on girls before." pointed out Dustin.

"Yeah, I know. It's just frustrating. I mean, why does it even matter? I'm only thirteen." he said, before falling into a silence, "can we talk about something else?"

"Yes." said Lucas, "You should've seen what was in Dustin's backyard the other day."

"What was it?" asked El, speaking up.

"Holes." said Dustin, "absolutely everywhere."

"And you didn't bother to bring it up?" said Will.

"Well, no one was picking up." said Dustin rolling his eyes. Lucas sighed,

"That's because it was eight in the morning! Anyway, we investigated and all the dirt in the holes was slimy and it was this weird color."

"You think it's from the Upside Down?" asked Mike. El and Will shared a wide-eyed look.

"Seriously?" asked Will.

"We're not sure. This morning the holes were filled up so I don't know." said Dustin.

"You guys really are the worst at making people feel better," joked Will, "I mean, we went from one bad subject to another even worse one."

"Well, what can I say? I'm just an expert at making people feel good."

said Dustin, with a laugh. The laugh seemed a little forced and failed at disguising how anxious Dustin really was about the situation. "I mean, we're saying that this is from the Upside Down but are any of you really grasping what that means?"

"Yeah, it means something's out there. And it's somehow getting up here." said Mike.

"But what?" said El.

"The howling." said Will, softly. Everyone turned to him.

"The what?" they said, all together.

"A few days ago, when we were all in the principal's office after the fight with Troy, I had an episode and when I went out into the hallway I heard the worst howling noise." said Will with a shiver. "I didn't see what it was though."

"I guess that's out monster." said Lucas.

"Hey El, I brought something for you." said Hopper, a few minutes into dinner.

"Oh?" she said, putting down her fork. Hopper put her birth certificate on the table and slid it towards her. She read over it a few times before asking, "Jane Hopper?"

"Jane is the name your mother gave you. You can still go by El if you want though. And I chose Hopper because I realized that it wouldn't make sense if your last name was Byers since you and Will are just about the same age. It also doesn't really matter since I'm planning to move in soon anyway." explained Jim. El smiled,

"Thank you." she said. It made her happy to know that her mother gave her a name, and that it was now her legal name, even if she wasn't going to go by it.

Will, however, choked on his water and said,

"You're moving in? Here?"

"Since when?" asked Jonathan, putting his fork down a little harder than necessary.

"We've talked about it a few times." said Joyce, "but we talked about it last night and today and came to a decision."

"It won't be immediate." said Hopper, "I'll probably start moving in slowly over the next few weeks."

"Is that… okay?" asked Joyce. Will and Jonathan made eye contact from across the table before Jonathan said,

"Yeah. Yeah, it's okay." he gave half-hearted smile and went back to eating.

After dinner, Will went to try and call Daniel again while everyone was cleaning up.

"Hello? Who's this?" asked Daniel. Will's eyebrows shot up,

"Oh. Hey. It's me, Will."

"Oh."

Silence.

"Are you mad at me?" asked Will.

"Why would I be mad at you?" asked Daniel.

"Because I said I wasn't gay."

"Well are you?" he asked.

"No. It doesn't matter and I'm not putting any thought to it. Are you?" asked Will.

"Yeah."

"But how can you be sure? We're young, surely we can't know for sure." he said.

"Oh? I can't be sure? That's bullshit Will and you know it. If we're

young, does that mean we're too young to date? Surely we can't know for sure if we love each other because we're only teenagers." said Daniel, angrily.

"I'm confused, do you want to break up or do you love me? Because that's a pretty shitty way to tell someone you love them." said Will, just as angrily.

"Listen, I'm sorry but I'm just really stressed right now. I'm grounded and my dad wants to take me to some dumb church thing. I just feel unstable and helpless and I'm taking it out on you, which I realize. Can you forgive me?" asked Daniel, closing his eyes.

"I'm sorry about your dad. And yeah, I'll consider it. But only one condition." said Will.

"What's your condition?" asked Daniel, smiling as he remembered their conversation from his birthday.

"That you answer my question."

"Hit me with it."

"Do you love me?" asked Will quietly. Though it wasn't the first thing on his mind, he really did hope that none of his family could hear the conversation he was having. But after hearing the faint beat of music playing and a burst of laughter from the kitchen he knew he was probably safe.

"Yes." said Daniel, without hesitation. "No matter what, I'm still going to be in love with you." Will bit his lip and leant against the wall, a wide grin on his face,

"I love you too." he said. They hung up and Will almost ran to his room, scaring El half to death.

"What?" she asked, eyes wide.

"He said he loves me!" said Will, cheeks flushed.

"Daniel?"

"Yes!" Will flopped down into the pillow fort with her. "We were arguing on the phone and then he said that we loved each other so I asked if he loved me and he said, that no matter what, he's still going to be in love with me. Isn't that so cute?"

"Yes, very... romantic." said El, using another word from a book she'd read recently.

"Mhm." sighed Will, smiling. "I've got to tell everyone else!" he said, running to get his supercom.

"Did you say it back?" asked Dustin.

"Obviously." said Will, rolling his eyes, even though no one could see him.

"So you guys went from arguing to saying *that*?" said Lucas.

"Yep." said Will with a happy sigh.

"Did he talk about what happened with his dad?" asked Mike.

"Yeah, he said he's grounded." said Will, before remembering something he wanted to say. "Speaking of… the ground, can I come over and see the holes in your yard, Dustin?"

"Sure, I was thinking of having everyone over on friday night to sleepover so we could just do it then. They magically filled up, like I said earlier but we can always dig some up again." said Dustin.

"Can you invite Max?" asked Lucas. Everyone rolled their eyes.

"Uh, maybe. We'll see." said Dustin.

"That seemed to go pretty well." said Joyce. It was later in the night and she and Hopper were cuddled in bed.

"Surprisingly. I really thought Jonathan was going to make a bigger deal about it." he said. Joyce shrugged,

"I think he's coming around to the idea. Besides he's going to college in a few years anyway." she finished with a sigh.

"Everything will work out in the end, you'll see."

"I hope you're right."

"You can trust me."

13. time after time

chapter thirteen

time after time

november eighteenth, 1984

"I can't stop thinking about Barb." said Nancy suddenly, closing her book with a snap and looking up at Jonathan.

"Oh? Why?" he asked, looking up from his book. They were in the library trying to study for their upcoming science test.

"It's been over a whole year since she was killed and… I don't know… I just feel so guilty. We were both there and just… she still died." she said, fiddling with her pencil.

"Neither of us could have done anything." said Jonathan, not really sure how to respond and trying not to let on to the fact that he'd also been thinking about Barb recently.

"I guess you're right." she said with a sigh. They fell into a silence before Nancy said, "I saw her parents at the grocery store a few days ago."

"How were they?" asked Jonathan.

"Not great. They smiled and made small talk but I could see that they were still really broken. I just wish we could tell them something." she said.

"Well, maybe we can." said Jonathan, a plan forming in his head.

It was hours later and the two of them were sat in Jonathan's car, the only noise being the tapping of rain on the window.

"Jonathan, are you going to tell me what's going on? We're going to be late for last period." said Nancy, arms crossed. She briefly thought of Steve who was probably wondering where she'd gone but pushed that thought away.

"We're not going to last period." Jonathan said finally, turning to face her.

"Okay… and the plan is?"

"We're going to go to the police and have them write up some kind of report saying that Barb was found recently in the woods - dead. It'll say that her body was too decomposed to be recognizable but they were able go get a dna match and it confirmed it."

"But we'll have to give a cause of death. Maybe a chemical spill from the lab or simply that she got murdered." said Nancy.

"We'll think of something."

"I'm sorry, you want me to say what?" said Hopper, eyebrows raised as he stared at the teens in front of him.

"Barb's parents need closure." said Nancy, "They'll never have to know we lied."

"They can have a funeral and move on with their lives. No damage done." said Jonathan. Hopper's eyes flicked between them,

"I don't know, guys… It's a big thing to lie like that." he said. Just then, Flo popped her head in,

"Hey, Chief, there's someone on the phone for you." she said.

"Okay. You two, stay right here I'll be back." said Hopper, as he got up and left the room, the door snapping shut behind him. The two glanced between each other and hopped up, quickly and quietly looking through drawers and baskets.

"If we find the blank police reports," said Jonathan, as he flipped through some files, "then we can just fill it out ourselves and no one will have to know."

"Won't we need a signature though?" asked Nancy.

"I can get that. He's moving in with us soon so it won't be too hard."

"He's moving in with you?" she said, eyebrows raised.

"Yeah," Jonathan rolled his eyes, "apparently he and my mom have been dating for months and no one knew about it."

"Wow."

Silence fell as they continued their search. It wasn't long before Jonathan whipped out a piece of paper and exclaimed,

"I got it!"

"Perfect. When he comes back let's just make an excuse and we can go back to my house and fill it out." said Nancy, closing the desk drawer she was going through and walking back to her chair, Jonathan not far behind. Their timing was perfect and as soon as they settled back down, Hopper came back in.

"Hey, so, I thought about it and I don't think I can do what you're asking." said Hopper, sitting back down. "I think you'll just have to make another plan. First of all-"

"No, no, it's okay." said Jonathan.

"Yeah, we realized our plan was a little crazy and we're going to try and come up with something else." said Nancy, trying to smile convincingly.

"Oh. Well, good luck." said Hopper, a little surprised that they'd given up so quickly. Goodbyes were exchanged and Jonathan and Nancy were off, back to the Wheeler house.

"I'd say that was a success." said Jonathan, grabbing the police report and handing it to Nancy while also trying to keep his eyes on the road.

"Me too." she said, surveying it. "I just hope that this doesn't come back badly on Hopper, if anything were to happen to prove it's not true."

"I think it'll be okay. If worse comes to worse, we can just fess up and hope for the best. I think everything will be fine though." he assured

her.

"I hope you're right."

The sun was setting through the window and the two of them were laying on their stomachs on Nancy's bed filling out the report. Nancy wrote most of it, her handwriting a little better than Jonathan's.

"Cause of death?" she asked, her pen hovering over the question.

"I'd say that from the looks of it, it appears that she was attacked by some kind of animal that has yet to be identified. It's a little out there but it's more digestible than the truth. We don't want to cause a ruckus. We're… watering it down, you could say." said Jonathan.

"Good idea." said Nancy, scribbling it down quickly. When she was done, she handed it to Jonathan. "Only the signature is left, good luck." he laughed quietly,

"Thanks. I better get back but it's been fun, uh, hanging out." he said.

"Well, maybe next time we can hang out under some better circumstances. When you get that signature call me and I'll plan a time to give it to the Hollands." said Nancy, smiling at him. They continued to stare at each other in silence for a few moments before Jonathan jumped up.

"Right, well, see you soon then!"

november nineteenth, 1984

"Where do you think you're going?" asked Billy as he watched Max throw clothes into her backpack.

"My friend's house. Unlike you, I've actually managed to make friends." she said.

"And you didn't tell me because…"

"Because last time I checked, you weren't my mom, my dad, or my brother so I didn't really feel the need to tell you." Max shot back, zipping up her bag and grabbing her skateboard as she pushed past

him, heading for the door.

It was Saturday night and the sleepover between Dustin, Lucas, Mike, Will, El, and Max was in full swing. However, it was interrupted not long after everyone arrived by the shrill noise of Dustin's doorbell.

"Who is that?" asked Will.

"That'll be Steve." said Dustin, rolling his eyes as he stood up to get the door.

"Harrington?" asked Will, Lucas, and Mike at the same time.

"Unfortunately." replied Dustin. El and Max shared a look. El had heard of Steve but had never actually met him.

"You little shits are way too old for a babysitter." said Steve, arms crossed as Dustin opened the door.

"If it were my choice I you wouldn't be here." said Dustin, rolling his eyes. Dustin's mom was on a girl's night out and had hired Steve to watch the kids. Though Dustin still wasn't quite sure why, seeing as they could all legally stay home alone.

"Good to know." said Steve. "Well, go off and do whatever pre-teens do for fun. I'll be here, doing homework."

As soon as they got back to Dustin's room, Lucas let out a soft laugh,

"Steve Harrington is babysitting us." he said. This lead everyone else to start laughing.

"I never really thought he was the babysitting type." said Will through his grin.

"Should we go check out the holes before it gets too dark?" asked Dustin, as soon as they all settled down.

"Yeah, hopefully we can get out without Steve noticing," said Mike, rolling his eyes. "He'll just make a scene."

"The holes?" asked Max, as everyone got up and followed Dustin out

of his room. Mike shushed her and ushered her out into the hallway. She rolled her eyes but stayed quiet as they filed out and followed Dustin out to his garage to grab some shovels. Will left the garage first, only a few seconds before everyone else. He walked around the house and went to the backyard, where dark brown dirt clashed with the vibrant green grass and obviously showed where the holes used to be located. He got on his knees and reached out to run his fingers in the dirt. At this point, everyone had gathered around and was watching him, a flashlight shining on the whole scene.

"I don't know guys, it seems like normal dirt to me. Kind of cold dirt, but still dirt." said Will, brushing the excess dirt of his hands and sitting back on his heels.

"What the hell are you guys doing?" asked Steve, making everyone jump.

"When did you get here?" asked Mike.

"Just now. I looked out the window and it looks like some kind of sacrifice is going on!" he exclaimed.

"Well, we're trying to figure out if this dirt is from the Upside Down." said Dustin, tossing Will the shovel he was holding. El shook her head and grabbed the shovel from him and tossed it aside, levitating the dirt on her own.

"You… what?" Steve closed his eyes in annoyance for a brief moment, "Are you guys ever normal? Like, at all?"

"Listen, if you're just going to stand there, you might as well join in." said Dustin. Steve grew quiet.

"Oh, that's weird." said Will, getting back on his knees. "This dirt is slimy." he said, as he grabbed a handful and watched as it simply fell off his hand, back into the ground.

"Right?!" said Dustin.

Will looked up at everyone, his face pale,

"This is definitely from the Upside Down." he said.

"What are we going to do?" asked Lucas, grabbing his own handful of dirt and letting it run through his fingers.

"Tell an adult?" suggested Max. Mike shrugged,

"We could tell an adult but what would they do that we can't?" he said.

"I know we're looking for some kind of howling creature but could that be what made these holes or is it something else entirely?" asked El, her hand gripping Mike's rather intensely.

"It could be anything." said Will, fear clearly written all over his face.

"Hey mom, do you know where El's birth certificate is?" asked Jonathan, peeking his head into the living room.

"Um, yeah, I think I saw it last in the dining room. Why?" said Joyce.

"Oh no reason, I was just wondering. We should probably get that filed away safely soon." he said, trying to act innocent. His mother nodded her agreement as he slipped past the doorway into the dining room. He pocketed the small piece of paper and took it back to his room where, for the next ten minutes, he practiced Hopper's signature, so he could then put it on the police report for Barb's death. It was lucky he remembered that Hopper had signed as El's father on the certificate, otherwise he wasn't sure how he would have gotten that signature. As soon as he was done, he quickly went to call Nancy.

"Guess what I got." he said, as soon as she picked up the phone.

"The signature?" she asked.

"Aw, how'd you know?" he asked, smiling into the phone.

"Just a lucky guess." she said, also smiling. "Well, I'll call the Hollands in the morning and ask if they want to meet for dinner. We can give it to them then." she said, a lot more serious than before.

"Okay. Sounds good." he said. "Oh, and Nancy?"

"Yeah?" she asked, just before putting the phone down.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing you." said Jonathan.

time after time by cyndi lauper

don't forget to leave some comments/questions! (unless you don't want to, i just love feedback lol)

14. alone

hello! just a little note, this song title is like only for jancy tbh so it's irrelevant for lots of this chapter haha. More notes at the end! Also, I reached page 100 on this chapter!

chapter fourteen

alone

november twentieth, 1984

"Jonathan and I have something we want to tell you." said Nancy, putting down her fork. The two of them were having dinner with Barb's parents. It had gone pretty well up until this point but Nancy knew she had to tell them.

"Yeah, Hopper wanted me to give you this." said Jonathan, pulling the police report from his bag and handing it to the couple.

"They uh, found Barb." said Nancy. The whole thing was making her rather emotional but she had kept up a pretty good facade until now. She let one tear out, mostly for the Holland's sake, she thought it would make the story a little more believable. But a small part of her brain knew that the tear was genuine, that rehashing all this was making her mourn her best friend all over again. That is, if she ever even stopped mourning her.

The rest of the night passed in almost a blur. Everyone cried. A lot. Except for Jonathan who was wishing he was somewhere else with every breath. He excused himself once, just to go stand in the bathroom and lean against the door, taking deep breaths with his eyes closed.

After a tearful goodbye late into the night, Nancy and Jonathan got into the car and Jonathan drove her home. Not much was said. Nancy mostly looked out of the window, the stars winking at her from above. When they got to her house, Jonathan stopped the car. No one got out. The two teens looked at each other, eyes full of sadness, regret, and desperation. And they kissed. Steve had fled both

of their minds and they existed only in the present, lips on lips. Nancy pulled away only to breathe but as soon as she did, she seemed to realise what had happened and froze.

"I shouldn't have done that." she said, fleeing the car, her thin frame soon enveloped in the blackness of the night. He collapsed back into his seat with a sigh before beginning his drive back home, taking a long time to start up his car just in case she decided to come back. She didn't.

november twenty-first, 1984

Tired and nervous, Will entered school on his first day back after the incident. He was so nervous about seeing Daniel and well, everyone, that he'd only gotten a few hours of sleep and they weren't good. As he walked through the halls, he realized that his tired state made it easier to block out the stares and whispers. Lucas nudged him,

"Hello?"

"Sorry. I only got three hours of sleep last night." said Will, adjusting his backpack straps and trying to stand a little taller, as if that might help him stay awake. "But I'm using it to my advantage by just blocking out everyone around me." Lucas snorted,

"Okay. Well I was just saying that we're meeting in the A/V room during lunch to make an official game plan regarding the holes. You can bring Daniel if you want but no kissing or fighting." he said the last part as a joke but Will didn't catch on, only giving him a weak smile and a thumbs up,

"See you then." he said, going into his classroom where he hoped he'd be able to zone out for a bit.

"Nancy!" exclaimed Jonathan, glancing the back of her head in the mass of people between them. Nancy sighed and put her head down, pushing through the crowd. She was not in the mood to talk to Jonathan after what happened but he seemed very determined. After a few 'ow's and 'what the hell's the two were walking side by side.

"Hey." she said shortly.

"Why are you mad at me?" asked Jonathan.

"I'm not. I'm mad at myself. I cheated on Steve, Jonathan." said Nancy, holding her books very tightly in her arms.

"Where is Steve?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?" she snapped at him.

"Not really. Listen, I just want you to know that whether you stay with Steve or break up with him I'm still going to support you. I want you to be happy." said Jonathan, stopping with her when she stopped by her locker. Nancy reached up and kissed his cheek,

"Thanks." she said.

It was a hard decision for Nancy. While she loved Steve, she was suddenly doubting how much of the love was genuine. Did she resent him for what happened with Barb without realising it? She always felt more alive with Jonathan. She felt free from her nuclear life and free to live in the world that she wanted. It was refreshing.

The meeting in the A/V room was going… a lot slower than expected.

"Any ideas?" asked Mike, spinning in slow circles on the swivel chair in the middle of the room. "at this point literally any suggestion is a good suggestion."

"How about tonight I ask Hopper about the holes? Maybe he'll have seen some other people with them." suggested Will.

"And you couldn't have suggested that like ten minutes ago?" asked Max.

"Well I only just thought of it. So no."

"Good idea. I think we should also ask El if she can figure out what we're actually looking for." said Mike.

"How would she do that?" asked Daniel. He sat beside Will rather quietly. They'd talked earlier in the day but it was still a little

awkward, they had yet to make eye contact, only stealing glances when the other wasn't looking.

"She can do this thing where she… goes into her uh, head, and can find people and stuff." said Mike, trying to explain it but not really understanding how it worked.

"Do you guys sell shovels?" asked Bob, taking Joyce by surprise.

"Oh, um, yes actually. They're in the back somewhere. If you can believe it, they aren't really the best sellers." said Joyce, closing her book and setting it down on the counter. "Bob?" she asked after finally looking up.

"Yep, that's me." he said with a laugh.

"Wow. I haven't seen you in awhile. Why do you need a shovel?"

"Well, it sounds a little weird but this morning I woke up there were all these holes in my backyard. I went to fill them up but I realized that my shovel broke recently and I needed a new one. I would have gone somewhere else but I was in the area so I thought I might as well check."

"Do you think it was a dog?" asked Joyce, as Bob went in search for a shovel.

"Most likely. I don't know what else it could have been." said Bob. He found his shovel and brought it back to the counter.

"Yeah." said Joyce with a short laugh. She secretly wondered if there was something else to it, if a something from the upside down was causing the holes. She quickly pushed those thoughts away, simply putting them down to overthinking. When Bob was walking out the door, new shovel in hand, Hopper was walking in.

"Hello." he said.

"Oh, hi! I wasn't expecting to see you until later." said Joyce, smiling at him.

"I was passing by so I thought I'd come see how you were." he

replied, going to kiss her over the counter. "Was that Bob Newby I saw leaving?" he asked.

"Yeah, he needed a shovel. Something about holes in his yard." said Joyce, settling back down into her chair.

"Holes?" he asked, eyebrows raised. Before Joyce could even respond, he was out the door, trying to catch Bob before he got into his car.

"I- where are you going?" she asked, hopping out of her seat and leaning over the counter, watching as Hopper ran down the street.

"Hopper, I was wondering it um, you know of anyone who has had holes in their yard? Besides the Everetts." asked Will when everyone was almost done with dinner.

"Well, actually, your mom saw Bob Newby today and he was having some problems as well but by the time I caught up to him at his house, he wasn't there." said Hopper.

"He wasn't there?" asked Joyce, "Where else could he have gone?" Hopper shrugged,

"I'm not sure. I was a little bit behind him and some cars got between us at one point so he might have gone somewhere else but I swore I saw him pull into his driveway."

"Was his car in his driveway?" asked El.

"Yeah. but maybe he was just inside and couldn't hear me knocking. I'll go back and check on him soon." said Hopper. "Why do you ask, Will?"

'I was just… curious." he said. "Thanks." he grabbed his plate and ran it to the sink, gesturing for El to follow him.

The two then went to the phone to call Daniel and tell him what they had learned. However, no one picked up. He acted nonchalant but was secretly a little upset. They then went to call Mike, Lucas, and Dustin on his supercom. The connection, usually a little rocky due to the distance was now even worse thanks to the rain that was currently tapping quietly on Will's window.

"So that's a third person that's experienced this?" asked Dustin.

"Yes. But Bob disappeared so we don't really know yet." said El.

"Well, he might not have disappeared. He could be at his house right now." Will reminded her.

"El, have you done your mind thingy yet? Tried to locate the monsters?" asked Lucas.

"No. I'm too tired now but I'll do it tomorrow after you guys get out of school." said El.

"We can do it at my house." said Mike. "You'll be there anyway."

"Tomorrow is Thanksgiving, silly, we don't have school." said Dustin, reminding the two of them.

"Oh right," said Mike with a laugh. El, however, was confused.

"Thanksgiving?" she asked.

"I'll explain it later," said Will, "It's a bit of a long story."

El and Will didn't go to bed for hours. With no school in the morning, there really wasn't any reason. They sat in Will's bed, both wrapped up in blankets and talking; accompanied only by Daisy, the warm light of Will's lamp, and the rain that lasted almost all night.

alone by heart

this is my third 80s song title in a row lmao. ALSO, I had an idea. So, I thought that if any of you have any fun plot things you want to see you can comment them and I'll try to work it in! I have my main plot mostly down and I do have ideas on fun things the kids can do but if there's something you really want to see, let me know!